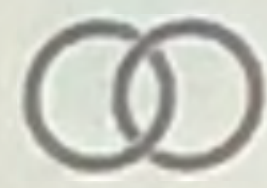


H A N D B O O K
— OF A —
HEALTHY
MUSLIM
MARRIAGE

UNLOCKING THE SECRETS
TO ULTIMATE BLISS

ABDUR-RAHMAN
IBN YUSUF MANGERA



For two of the most beloved women in my life:

My dear mother Amina 𐤀𐤎𐤊 (d. 1429/2008),

Amn—reliability, safety, trustworthiness

(may Allāh have mercy on her)

and my dear wife



TRANSLITERATION KEY

ء	' (A slight catch in the breath. It is also used to indicate where the <i>hamza</i> has been dropped from the beginning of a word.)	غ	gh (Pronounced like a throaty French <i>r</i> with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)
ا	a, ā	ف	f
ب	b	ق	q (A guttural <i>q</i> sound with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)
ت	t	ك	k
ث	th (Should be pronounced as the <i>th</i> in <i>thin</i> or <i>thirst</i> .)	ل	l
ج	j	م	m
ح	h (Tensely breathed <i>h</i> sound.)	ن	n
خ	kh (Pronounced like the <i>ch</i> in Scottish <i>loch</i> with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	و	w, ū, u.
د	d	ه	h
ذ	dh (Should be pronounced as the <i>th</i> in <i>this</i> or <i>that</i> .)	ي	y, ī, i
ر	r	ﷺ	<i>Ṣalla 'Llāhu 'alayhi wa sallam</i> —used following the mention of the Messenger Muḥammad, translated as, "May Allāh bless him and give him peace."
ز	z	ﷺ	<i>'Alayhi 'l-salām</i> —used following the mention of a prophet or messenger of Allāh, translated as, "Upon him be peace."
س	s	ﷺ	<i>'Alayha 'l-salām</i> —used following the mention of a female related to a prophet of Allāh, translated as, "Upon her be peace."
ش	sh	ﷺ	<i>Raḍiya 'Llāhu 'anhū</i> —used following the mention of a companion of the Messenger ﷺ, translated as, "May Allāh be pleased with him."
ص	ṣ (A heavy <i>s</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	ﷺ	<i>Raḍiya 'Llāhu 'anhā</i> —used following the mention of a female companion of the Messenger ﷺ, translated as, "May Allāh be pleased with her."
ض	ḍ (A heavy <i>d/dh</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	ﷺ	<i>Raḍiya 'Llāhu 'anhum</i> —plural of the above two, translated as, "May Allāh be pleased with them."
ط	ṭ (A heavy <i>t</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)		
ظ	ẓ (A heavy <i>dh</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)		
ع	‘, ‘a, ‘i, ‘u (Pronounced from the throat.)		



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INTRODUCTION

﴿وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَذُرِّيَّةً﴾

We sent messengers before you and gave them wives and offspring (Ra'd, 13:38).

IN THE NAME OF ALLĀH Most Gracious Most Merciful. All praise is due to Allāh, whose subtle bounties shower down upon the worlds, and whose servants receive them one after another willingly or unwillingly. Among His blessings is that He has created human beings from mere fluid, then made them kin by blood and marriage. He has placed sexual desire in them and inspired them to sow their seed and seek progeny. He has raised up lineage and granted it a lofty status. He has rendered unlawful all fornication and made clear its detriment and repugnance. He has encouraged marriage and promised great reward for it. Finally, He has ordained that all creatures depart this world, but plant their seeds to bring about a new generation to replace those He calls back.

All praise and blessings be showered upon His beloved Messenger, whom He appointed to teach, warn and give glad tiding, who was the most excellent of husbands to his wives, and upon his pure family, esteemed companions, and all those married couples striving to follow his way of excellence.

The institution of marriage is a pillar of a successful society. The relationship between a husband and wife allows them to strengthen and support one another, to grow, to develop and to find peace and

sanctuary. It allows children to enter the world and to be brought up in an environment of safety and security so that they will grow to be upright members of society. Marriage is integral to the Islamic tradition and plays a huge part in the spiritual life of both the individual and the community. The Prophet ﷺ said, "When a person marries, half of his religion has been completed. He should now be mindful of Allāh regarding the other half" (Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, 5100). I will explain this ḥadīth in more detail later.

It is unfortunate, then, that although most Muslims enter into a marital relationship, there remains much ignorance surrounding the various ethical, practical, religious, social and spiritual issues regarding marriage. Many of the questions that Islamic scholars and counsellors receive are on the topic of marriage, and they reveal a very troubling state of affairs in our communities. Most people know how to get married and enjoy the happy times of marriage, but many do not know how to stay married when serious conflict arises, and there exists little guidance for young people today to navigate those difficult times. Even in petty situations, many men hasten to utter divorce without considering the possible permanent effects of doing so, and sadly, by the time an issue is brought up with the *shaykh* or *muftī*, a couple may simply be faced with a no-return answer: "You are irrevocably divorced." If only they had known, studied and learnt at least the basics, they could have avoided much difficulty and heartache. This applies not only to the very serious issue of divorce, but all the various facets of marriage and family life. Even for couples who remain married, if they do not work to resolve their problems, their marriages can over time fall into irreversible disrepair.

While we as Muslims are guided by our religious precepts in all aspects of our lives, it is in the issue of marriage, perhaps uniquely, that cultural practices come into play and get intermingled with religious precepts. We have to be able to get through this cloud, to differentiate between what is cultural and what is not. Parents, particularly among the first generation who have travelled to Western countries and maintain various cultural identities, are often naturally possessive of the marriages of their daughters and sons, and may cloak various

cultural issues in an Islamic garb. This then poses a problem, as for most people one's parents are considered their first, and sometimes only, source of Islam. After all, as the saying goes, the mother's lap is the first *madrassa*. Add to this the influence of Western culture, in which traditional gender roles in marriage have been broken down. Many a time we may not realise that some of these gender roles were actually Islamic and not just purely cultural. Marriage thus becomes a complicated subject with various issues at play.

On the other hand, some young adults have grown up in homes devoid of healthy family interaction and nurture. When it comes to marital relationships in particular, a large part of their conception of marriage is garnered from the movies and soaps they watch or the celebrities and stars they follow. Since there is nothing better at home to go by, marriage for them ends up being a cheating, flirty and dysfunctional relationship that more often than not ends in deception, heartache, lies and misery as depicted on screen or on social media. Soaps and movies with healthy marriages would be boring, no?

Therefore, learning about not only the religious laws and technicalities of marriage and divorce, but importantly the prophetic model for a healthy marital relationship, is an extremely important matter. Whether one is unmarried, newly married, long married, or divorced or widowed, it is essential that one study the prophetic paradigm and strive to apply and convey it to others in their family and circles of influence. There are many misconceptions in our communities and it is only through a collective effort of returning to the guiding teachings of our Messenger ﷺ that we may move forward in rectifying the current state of affairs.

This book cannot cover all aspects of every culture. There are many permissible and impermissible cultural practices taking place related to marriage. We cannot deal with them all here. Here I cover what I have observed in the various communities from the several countries across various continents in which I have lived—the UK, US, India, Syria and South Africa—and during my experience as an *imām* and *muftī*, through the hundreds of couples and individuals with whom I have had discussions and consultations on marital issues.

The chapters will touch on issues ranging from finding a partner and wedding ceremonies to dealing with marital problems and sensitive issues that should not be shied away from, including dealing with in-laws, domestic violence and matters of sexual intimacy. All of these will be addressed from the viewpoint of the Qur'an and Sunna as I have found it interpreted by people of learning from my time and from authorities past. Although I will speak prescriptively, this book is not intended to be the final word on the subject, nor to serve as a kind of updated marriage chapter from a *fiqh* manual. As human beings with complex lives and situations, each reader will come with a different set of desires, problems and questions for which he or she seeks answers. The topic of marriage is vast and this book cannot touch upon every issue.

In my work advising and counselling couples, I generally tell the husband, when I am speaking to him alone, that he must make 70% of the sacrifice, and I do the same when speaking to the wife. This is to get them both to make the best effort on their part and hopefully meet each other half way. I adopt a similar approach in this book. When reading a section dedicated to you, if you feel as a woman or man that I am telling you to make the greater effort and sacrifice, my suggestions should not be interpreted as demanding more of either men or women. Both share immensely in the responsibility of making a marriage work.

The idea for this book was born from the immense interest that programs and talks on marriage related topics generate. They tend to be some of the most well-attended programs in the Muslim community. Repeatedly have I heard the need being expressed for another book on marriage. Several times I have been invited to deliver talks and even whole-day seminars on the subject. I am sure there are many excellent books on the Islamic marriage, but I intentionally avoided reading any while writing this one. This is because I wanted this book to be purely based on my experiences, interactions and learning and did not want it to be a repeat of what others had said. However, the subject of marriage is a generic and organic one and our religion is one. Hence, there will no doubt be

similarities to other books, but I pray that Allāh allow this book to be a worthwhile contribution to the genre.

The first draft of this work was written up by a woman (an *'alima* who is married with children, may Allāh bless her abundantly) and was based on material I had delivered in spoken or written form over the last decade: the recordings of a full-day marriage seminar in 2013 at a mosque in East London; a shorter seminar entitled "Love, Marriage and Fairytales" in 2016 at a university in South London; the transcript of a talk on divorce in 2011 at a university in East London; several other related lectures at miscellaneous venues and other written answers and notes. She produced the first consolidated draft in 2016. Since then I worked on thoroughly editing the draft and researching and adding several new sections to get it to its current form. Its first rendition being drafted by a woman has probably helped it to be more balanced and not entirely from a man's perspective.

Finally, I do not claim to be an expert on this subject. Some of what I say may be controversial or personally irrelevant, and readers are entitled, perhaps even encouraged, to receive what I say with a grain of salt. However, having provided advice to numerous couples and individuals over two decades, I have had the benefit of observing marriages both succeed and fail, and I have also been married for as long and gone through my own share of challenges like anyone else. I therefore ask you not to discount the useful parts of this book on account of those that you find objectionable. Marriage is never a perfect game and we can always learn from the experiences of others. I also welcome your comments and suggestions, which will help me greatly should I prepare a subsequent edition. If you are not yet married then I would still advise that you read the entire book through once. This will help you be better aware of the path ahead and hopefully steer clear of avoidable blunders. You can always go back and read relevant sections again as you cross those milestones in your marriage.

Now for some housekeeping notes. I have attempted to make this book an easy read for anyone of the age of marriage and have tried to avoid too much legalese or technicalities, as it is not intended to be

a formal and rigorously academic study. References for all Qur'ānic verses, ḥadīths, religious texts and other material cited have generally been incorporated into the body of the text. Only lengthy ones have been put in footnotes. Dates of death that follow people's names are put in the dual format with the Hijri year followed by the Gregorian (eg., 505/1111). A few Arabic terms have been used in the book; some because they are well known among Muslims and best represent the idea being discussed, others because they are of a technical nature and are cited for the interested reader, but always with their English equivalents.

I now take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have helped in the production of this work, especially my family, teachers, students, reviewers and above all those who enriched my experience, knowledge and understanding by trusting me to answer their questions and sharing with me their very personal stories. This book could not have been the same without them. My gratitude is also to Shaykh Nazir and his wife Shaykha Zaibunnisa Haji, without whose insight and recommendation I may have never met and married my beloved wife and achieved together what we have.

O Allāh, I entreat You to make this an accepted endeavour. How many a better and more qualified person there is to have undertaken this task. Yet, O Allāh, You enabled me to complete it despite my weakness and deficiency in knowledge, wisdom and all else. How can I then not be truly grateful? My heartfelt prayer is that You protect this work from being a disgrace to the very surface it has been inscribed upon; You make it a source of benefit and enhancement to the married lives of its readers, and by virtue of them to others; and You grant us all happy and loving families in this world and a blissful existence in our eternal life in the Gardens of Bliss.

ABDUR-RAHMAN IBN YUSUF MANGERA
London, UK
Rabī' al-Awwal 1440 | November 2018

Chapter 1



MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE IN ISLAM

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

Allāh created Ādam ﷺ as the first human being, without mother or father. He was created in the adult form and thus did not go through the stages of embryonic development in the womb. Rather he was created in full form and his spirit was blown into him. Allāh then created another human form, very similar to Prophet Ādam ﷺ — Ḥawwā', or Eve. She was not created as a separate genus or species, but she was made from Ādam ﷺ himself, from one of the ribs of his left side. When Ādam ﷺ became conscious he found Ḥawwā' next to him and immediately felt an attraction and inclination toward her. Had she not been created from him, this sort of natural attraction, compassion and love between spouses would not have been present (see Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1:514; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2:206). There is thus a great wisdom in the method of Allāh's creation. He creates what He wants and as He wills. He says,

﴿وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً
وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ﴾

And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between

you affection and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought (Rūm, 30:21).

This verse tells us that Allāh has placed love and mercy between the spouses. A man holds on to his wife because he naturally loves her, as the mother of his children feels compassion for her, or feels an intimate relationship, congeniality and harmony with her. This is what Allāh has intended by building mutual attraction into the primordial nature of men and women and predisposing them to each other. Indeed, in it are signs for those who give thought.

Once while in *i'tikāf* (spiritual retreat) during Ramaḍān, I was sitting eating with a much older *shaykh* who had taken a liking to me, and who would sometimes engage me in informal discussions. He asked his son if he had called his mother. I jokingly inquired from him if he was still so concerned after all these years. This is when he explained to me something that further clarified the above verse for me. He said that when spouses get older, they may no longer have the need to touch one another or be physically intimate, but their affection and love continue to increase even if they are apart. Hence, love between spouses is not all about the sexual aspect. It is much more than that.

Finding tranquillity is one of the most important functions of marriage. For a husband and wife to be together is one of the most efficient ways for a person to gain comfort, calm, peace and stability within oneself. In fact, studies have shown that married people are less likely to engage in crime as marriage helps them to develop greater self-control.¹ The Prophet ﷺ found this safety and comfort in his marriage to Khadija, who acted as the perfect wife even in the most demanding of times. She comforted him when the onset of revelation distressed him. She gave him wise counsel and supported him financially and emotionally and became the first person to accept Islam. A righteous spouse can thus be a source of great comfort to a person during the ongoing challenges of life.

¹ <http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/news/married-people-less-likely-to-commit-crime-says-new-study> (accessed 5/12/2018).

The comfort and support that spouses provide to each other is complementary in nature. The wife, as in the creation of Ḥawwā' with Ādam, is a source of comfort, contentment and rejuvenation for the husband. In turn, for a wife the husband provides a sense of comfort, security and support. While these functions are similar, they are not exactly the same. It is very important that as we discuss marriage and the roles of men and women that we move beyond the idea of competition between the male and the female. What the female is designed for is not what the male is designed for, and what the male is designed for the female is not designed for. Both have different, complementary roles, the one necessary for the other. Both are essentially the same in the sight of Allāh. Each one is accountable for his or her deeds in the court of Allāh. Each strives in gaining proximity to Him and has his or her own unique journey to Him. This journey takes into account their differing natures and unique challenges. A woman who has gone through the natural challenges of childbirth and rearing young children may find the spiritual path easier than a male who has been treading the path for many more years, engaged in many outward forms of worship. Her consistent sacrifice and struggle, the physical challenges she endures and her regular battling with the self and ego through service to others, all done with the correct intentions, may raise her to much greater levels of closeness to Allāh. We see then that the paths of men and women may be different in nature, but the end goal is always the same. Their differences in fact represent two halves which, when brought together in marriage, create one cohesive whole, allowing both to fulfil their ultimate purpose. They are clearly made for one another.

The spouses finding tranquillity and comfort in one another is attested elsewhere in the Qur'ān. Allāh Most High says,

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ إِلَيْهَا فَلَمَّا تَغَشَّاهَا حَمَلَتْ حَمْلًا خَفِيفًا فَمَرَّتْ بِهِ فَلَمَّا أَثْقَلَتْ دَعَوَا اللَّهَ رَبَّهُمَا لَئِنْ آتَيْتَنَا صَالِحًا لَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ﴾

It is He who created you from one soul and created from it its

mate that he might dwell in security with her. And when he covers her, she carries a light burden and continues therein. And when it becomes heavy, they both invoke Allāh, their Lord: "If You should give us a good [child], we will surely be among the grateful" (A'raf, 7:189).

The Arabic word used in both of the above verses is *sukūn* (stillness, peace, tranquillity). It denotes finding rest after being in motion. A good spouse is said to provide this, with the attainment of *sukūn* being one of the main functions of marriage. In fact, the Arabic word denoting the home where the spouses live is *maskan*, a place of *sukūn*. This *sukūn* has many facets: psychological and spiritual, which we have covered, and, importantly, physiological. Fulfilling the human need for physical intimacy is an important part of the marital relationship, and spouses must be sensitive to one another's needs in this regard. Sex represents only a small proportion of the responsibilities of marriage, yet a huge proportion of the problems occurring in marriage arise from sexual dissatisfaction. Many of these problems may appear, on the surface, to be about unrelated matters. When probed, however, these deeper issues come to the fore. Given the importance of intimacy in a successful marriage, it is necessary for any shyness and embarrassment about this topic to be overcome.

LOVE AND KIND TREATMENT IN MARRIAGE

The husband and wife, in fulfilling their obligations to one another, in supporting each other and creating a life together, ensure that tranquillity come from both sides. They work together to create a strong relationship as the foundation of a strong family unit. As a united couple they will be able to tackle any issues that they come across over the course of their married life, by the permission of Allāh. But imagine if a person were to have problems outside of the home and were then to return home to find yet more problems. One can change jobs, but it is not so simple to just drop and change your

spouse—the institution of marriage holds too much responsibility and the weight of communal obligations that go with it. Although governed by a type of contract, a marriage is not like a commercial transaction. It concerns a deep and profound relationship between two human beings.

Love is central to this relationship. In the first verse quoted above, Allāh says that He placed affection (*marwadda*) and mercy (*rahma*) between spouses. Affection is not simply the emotion of love, but an abiding love accompanied by intense longing. This love that one has for one's spouse often exceeds the love one has for all other created beings, including one's parents.

We know that the highest level of spiritual love is the love that one can have for the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and love for Allāh Himself (may He be exalted). The great sage Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānawī (d. 1362/1943) once commented on how it is possible for the *awliyā'* (saints) to love their spouses when they have experienced this highest level of love. How could an inferior kind of love compare? He explained that the *walī* (saint) experiences the truest love, the love for Allāh Most High, which is greater than all. If one has achieved this high form of love and become a *true lover*, they will be able to express better love for their spouse and anyone else they are supposed to love. So understanding divine love will enhance one's love for creation.

The idea of deep love and closeness between spouses is further explained in another verse:

﴿هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَّكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَّهُنَّ﴾

They are a garment to you and you are a garment to them (Baqara, 2:187).

This description is amazingly comprehensive. The concept of clothing carries many different subtleties and meanings, making it an appropriate analogy for the relationship between husband and wife. Clothing is used to beautify, honour and protect the human being. The successor (*tābi'ī*) and exegete Rabī' ibn Anas (d. 139/756) explains this verse to mean that one spouse is a cover for the other (*Tafsīr Ibn*

Kathīr, 1:510), hence a guard or protection. Furthermore, clothing is something that is intimate, held close to the body. It is right next to you, even when you hug someone. In this way, Allāh wishes you to make your spouse the closest person to you. When people deal with clothing, they buy the best they can afford, keep it clean and pressed, mend it if torn, and use it to dress well and beautify themselves. They derive much comfort through their clothing and feel a great sense of pleasure with it next to their skin. In other words, people take a lot of pride in their clothing. Similarly, one takes great care in choosing one's spouse. The husband and wife then protect and support one another, providing mental, moral and physical security as well as sexual fulfilment that protects them from the unlawful. They work on their relationship, meet each other's needs and tend to one another when ill, especially in times of difficulty. They take pride in one another and enjoy the closeness and intimacy each provides.

Marriage, then, cannot sustain without love. There must be love, mercy and compassion between husband and wife. If a couple attempt to go through their married life simply following the bare minimum of what Islamic law dictates, it creates a very unhealthy foundation for their relationship. Technically, according to some scholars, it is not even necessary for a man to pay for his wife's treatment if she falls sick. Technically, the wife only needs to make herself sexually available and to take care of the husband's assets by not allowing unapproved people into his home, and if it is not expected and understood from the culture, she doesn't have to do any cleaning or cooking or even to nurse the husband's infant. If one limits the relationship to these details alone, it is likely that the marriage will soon break up. The legal rulings provide an understanding of the minimum, the very basics of what is required to try to maintain a marriage in times of difficulty. Beyond this, success in marriage depends on compromise, generosity, good character, love and sacrifice. The importance of good character is attested in the Qur'ān, where Allāh says,

﴿وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ﴾

And live with them in kindness (Nisā', 4:19).

Men are instructed to deal with their wives with kindness and excellent character. The word used here is related to the word *'ashira*, meaning clan, kinsfolk and closest relative, and points to the background of this verse. In the time of the Prophet ﷺ, the prevailing Arabian culture placed a huge emphasis on tribal affiliation, to the extent that a leader's accepting Islam would lead his entire tribe to do the same. Upon marriage, a woman would move to live with her husband and his tribe, and yet many men would treat common tribeswomen better than they would treat their own wives who had come from other tribes. They were thus appropriately instructed by the words *'āshiruhunna* to treat them with the highest level of honour and respect as they would their own tribeswomen. As the exegete Ibn Kathīr explains (2:242), it means speak with them pleasantly, beautify your conduct and interact well with them to your utmost ability, and to do unto them what you would like them to do unto you, for Allāh says, "Wives possess rights similar to those held over them to be honoured with fairness" (Baqara, 2:228).

To understand this instruction to treat one's wife with kindness and the best of manners, we look to the life of the Prophet ﷺ as a model of immaculate character. The guidance we find in his statements and actions regarding marriage is both comprehensive and profound. He fully and successfully demonstrated in practice what the Qur'ān had instructed. The mother of the believers Lady 'Ā'isha رضى الله عنها relates that the Prophet ﷺ said, "The best of you is the one who is best to his wife, and I am the best of you to my wives" (*Tirmidhī*, 3895). In another ḥadīth Abū Hurayra رضى الله عنه reports that the Prophet ﷺ said, "The most complete in faith are those of you who are best in character, and the best of you are those who are best to their womenfolk" (*Tirmidhī*, 1162).

The Prophet ﷺ had nine wives at one time and dealt with them all in the best of manners. From his advice above, we see that there is a strong relationship between good character (*akhlāq*) and marital success. Regardless of its utility for a wife or a husband, it is necessary to develop one's character simply as a believer. Good character is the best form of invitation (*dā'wa*) to Allāh, both to those we

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know and those we do not, while on the other hand bad character can inflict severe wounds in one's life. Deception, lying and oppression are some of the worst characteristics to have, and they can inflict huge damage to one's marriage. Fairness, honesty and justice must prevail and the fruits of good character will be seen in the health of the marriage. Even the subtlest cues in the facial expressions of one spouse while the other is talking to them can indicate to the adept whether a marriage is solid or not. Is there love hidden under the anger? Or contempt? The way the husband and wife deal with each other in their daily interactions, whether they apply the prophetic teachings of upright conduct in the small details of their everyday life, and whether they even act out the basic human demands of common decency and chivalry, will add up over time to determine the success or failure of their marriage.

THE WEIGHT OF MARRIAGE

Striving for a healthy relationship based on love and good character is essential, as marriage is a relationship that outlasts the temporary life of this world. You will not be with your parent or your child in Paradise—you will be with your spouse. The weight of this relationship and significance is mentioned in many narrations. It is narrated by Anas رضي الله عنه that the Prophet ﷺ said, "When a person marries half of his religion has been completed. He should now be mindful of Allāh regarding the other half" (Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, 5100).

There are many interpretations for this narration. One is that while marriage is just one aspect of the Muslim faith, the Prophet ﷺ has exaggerated it and deemed it half of the faith to highlight its importance and its influence on a person's social and spiritual life. The reviver of the fifth century, Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), explains that the two most destructive factors to a person's faith are the sexual organs and the stomach. Marriage helps to take care of the former by providing protection against the devil, calming one's sexual desire and curbing the need to explore unlawful

avenues to fulfil one's urges. After marriage, a person need only work on controlling the other destructive factor—the stomach.

Yet another prophetic narration states, "Whoever guarantees for me that which is between their thighs and jawbones I guarantee for them Paradise" (*Bukhārī*, 6474). Again, most spiritual destruction arises from misuse either of the tongue or of the private parts. Marriage, as explained above, provides protection for the private parts, so "that which is between their legs" is protected and now the protection of "that which is between the jawbones" remains for an individual to be granted Paradise.

A further understanding of the ḥadīth can be gained by looking at another, in which Anas رضي الله عنه reports that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever Allāh has provided a righteous wife, He has helped him in half his faith, and so he should be mindful of Allāh in the other half" (Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, 5101; Ḥākim, *Al-Mustadrak*, 2681). Bringing together the idea of marriage being half of faith and having a righteous spouse suggests that for a marriage to hold such significance, righteousness has to be central to the marriage. Otherwise, simply being married is not necessarily a ticket to spiritual success.

MARRIAGE IN OUR TIMES

When we look to Western societies, we see that many people are not married. Statistics show that marriage rates have declined to historic lows, but despite this, divorce rates are at their highest. It doesn't help that in this day and age, marriage has become something that is taken very lightly, to the extent that for some people divorcing a spouse has become as easy as returning an unwanted item recently purchased. To complicate matters, our society has reached an unprecedented level of sexual licentiousness; we see cohabitation, children born out of wedlock, various sexual orientations and relationships, together with the widespread sexualisation of everyday life. It is all too easy to "hook up" with someone and engage in illicit sexual relations (*zinā*). In the Muslim world, finding a physical partner for *zinā*

may be a bit more difficult, but even there sexual vices are becoming increasingly accessible. What is now left to decide is how we deal with the situation in which we find ourselves.

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There is a reason why the Prophet ﷺ placed so much importance on marriage and told people not to abstain from it. To have a human connection is a real human need. We have a natural desire for companionship. To have a person with whom we can share our life, someone who will bring us happiness and joy and be a source of comfort in times of difficulty is a very essential human feeling. Such is the nature of this feeling that when we are not married, it occupies our thoughts and makes it difficult to be fully focused on anything else. In cases where one has extreme desire and fears falling into *zinā*, marriage even becomes *wājib* (necessary).

We must therefore take steps to facilitate and prepare for marriage and to help others with the same. One of the most important things in this regard is that we be mindful of what can sabotage a marriage, so that we can avoid common mistakes and their harmful consequences. A person starting a business does not simply look at how to set up the business and make a profit; they also learn about the risks involved so that they can mitigate and manage them. This allows the entrepreneur to avoid potential issues or at least have some awareness of the problems they might face.

In the same way, having a successful marriage is not easy and it takes continuous effort from both spouses. Both should be aware that life is not always a bed of roses and there will inevitably be difficult times. They should anticipate such challenges ahead of time and take proactive steps to prepare for them. It is also extremely important to know and understand some religious laws related to marriage before embarking on this journey. It is more than just coming to the mosque, repeating a few words in front of the *imām* and handing over the agreed *mahr* (marriage payment). There are opportunities for us to please Allāh each step of the way, from choosing a partner to the engagement and the marriage ceremony itself. When the marrying

couple strives to follow the laws of Allāh throughout the process and during the marriage itself, they will, God willing, gain more blessings in their union.



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يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا
إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allāh is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allāh is Knowing and Acquainted (Hujurāt, 49:13).

Chapter 2



PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

For many young men and women, the first thing they do after agreeing to marry someone is start preparing for the wedding day. There are many things to organise, from the wedding attire and the venue to the food and guest list — and the list goes on. But given how much thought we put into planning the few days of wedding festivities, how much more effort should we be putting into preparing for the marriage itself? How much more time should we invest in preparing for something that will, God willing, last not only for the rest of our lives but indeed for eternity, as the righteous believing spouses will be together in Paradise?

Preparation for marriage is needed well in advance of even looking for a potential partner. It is amazing that of all the Islamic studies courses offered today, courses on marriage are some of the most highly attended, yet marital discord is one of the biggest problems our communities face. As seen earlier, the institution of marriage holds a weighty position in the life and deeds of a Muslim. Thorough preparation is essential, but not only by learning the rules and technicalities of marriage, on “rights and responsibilities,” which are what many courses almost exclusively focus on. Preparation also involves understanding what a successful relationship entails, thinking deeply about the realities of sharing a complete life with another person, and working on your personal development so that you are yourself ready for this commitment. As you sit around daydreaming about

Mr or Mrs Right, remember that you yourself need to be Mr or Mrs Right for your future spouse.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO PREPARE FOR MARRIAGE

There are many practical ways one can prepare for marriage. One can start by reading a book on marriage such as this one or many others. The more you read the better an idea you will have of what to expect. Being prepared and having realistic expectations of what married life will entail is very important. One couple in my family, both in their early twenties at the time, had been happily married for about seven months. Everything seemed to be going perfectly (this "honeymoon" period doesn't last quite as long for a lot of people!) when, during a disagreement, the wife suddenly spoke back harshly to the husband for the first time. He felt as though the world around him were crumbling, that this small comment meant she didn't like him anymore. It was only after speaking with a colleague the day after that he discovered such responses were far from unusual between couples, and that it did not necessarily mean a loss of love between them. Some reading this may find it shocking to have such an unrealistic expectation as to never have an argument, but I have encountered many young people who go into marriage thinking this way. Arguments, whether big or small, are inevitable. Even in the most peaceful marriages, little tremors and the occasional earthquake break out as surely as when the tectonic plates in the earth rub against each other every once in a while. If you have a better idea of what to expect, such episodes will be easier to manage.

A person looking to get married can also attend seminars and courses related to marriage, and speak to older friends and relatives for advice. According to some of my colleagues and friends, prospective couples in Malaysia must take a marriage information course before getting married, and there is an increasing number of mosques in the US that will not administer a marriage until the couple go through premarital counselling. The latter is especially useful in getting the

potential spouses to unload the concerns (some call it baggage) that they have about each other or even about themselves. In most cases the exercise is a useful preparation for resolving conflicts in marriage, and in a few instances the couple can discover critical problems that may warrant delaying or even calling off the engagement. Though this is a bitter outcome, it is far better than to suffer through a disastrous marriage. Some people have gone through traumatic previous marriages or endured other difficult personal troubles, or they may simply suffer from anger problems or have other problems of character. The purpose of counselling is not to look for reasons not to marry someone, but to go into marriage aware of the challenges one might face. Such preparatory coursework, whether done online or in person, is usually very beneficial.

WHEN TO GET MARRIED

The best time to get married differs from person to person. Everyone has a unique lifestyle, temperament and circumstances. However, especially given the sexual permissiveness of contemporary society, it is generally regarded as best for an individual to marry as soon as one feels mature enough and is financially ready. At the basic level, a man must be able to provide a modest living for a wife. That said, if a man's means are still modest, such as when he is still a student, it is not wrong for him to take support from family or his wife if they voluntarily contribute to the expenses. An inability to provide comfortably, especially in the early part of marriage, should not prevent a couple from marrying, and close family should, within reason, try to help their young relatives. Here is an example where the letter of the law, if simplistically applied, can cause problems. If spouses rigidly demand what the law entitles them, without considering the circumstances, many young, responsible people who are otherwise ready to get married would delay to their possible detriment. Conversely, if spouses willingly give up certain rights for a time to help each other and approach the relationship with cooperation

and accommodation, they will, God willing, set themselves up for a strong marriage based on love and mercy. The ability to sacrifice willingly now prepares one when life forces them to make sacrifices later on. It is often the case that when a person eventually marries, he wishes he would have done so many years ago and avoided the multiple years of temptation and struggle he had endured. A ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ states, "O young people! Whoever among you can marry should marry, because it helps him lower his gaze and guard his modesty, and whoever is not able to marry should fast, as fasting diminishes sexual urge" (*Bukhārī*, 5066; *Muslim*, 1400).

Should one wait to finish their seminary or university studies before getting married? This again depends on the individual. For some, the prospect of marriage while still a student is difficult, whereas others may have the means. It is possible for a couple to marry as students and then to study and travel further before the added responsibilities of children, perhaps even studying after children enter the picture. It all depends on the couple, their resources and Allāh's providence (*tawfiq*). That being said, though marriage in Islam should be a simple affair, for some families the various formalities, festivities and time-consuming events can become detrimental to the couple's academic progress. This is something that should be taken into consideration.

There are many problems in the community regarding the right time for marriage. There are extremes, where on the one hand parents may prevent their child from considering marriage at all until they have completed their BA, MA, or an advanced professional degree, and then worked and earned enough for a house or perhaps even enough to afford the lavish gifts and extremely high dowry demanded in certain circles. Some people even wait until they have saved sufficient funds to finance a "dream wedding," even after they have met their future spouse. This is a big problem, and these attitudes create a barrier to marriage and thus push our youth toward sinning with their eyes or even illicit premarital relations.

On the other hand, some parents may have a young son or daughter who is involved in all sorts of problematic behaviours, whether

that be having a boyfriend or girlfriend, or using alcohol and drugs, and they somehow think that marrying their child off immediately to the first person that comes along will be the solution to their problems. They sometimes even hide the problems and advertise the young person as being very pious to get them married to someone truly pious who the parents hope will fix them. All the while, the son or daughter is not interested and is being pressured. This happens time and time again. Soon after the wedding the façade breaks down and for many the prospect of having a successful marriage is over before it has even begun.

In certain cases, a person may be wayward and have certain problems, but feels that he or she wants to change, get married and settle down, then this is an entirely different matter. Similarly, if someone is reformed and no longer engages in past sinful behaviours, it is not necessary to reveal these past issues to a prospective spouse if they will not impact their marriage going forward. However, it is essential to be honest and to present oneself honestly based on one's current situation. Previous unresolved relationships, gambling addictions and the like can be very dangerous to a new marriage if they have not been declared.

Another practice that has led to a lot of problems is importing their spouse from another country, and then waiting for the relevant immigration procedures to be finalised. After the initial meeting and marriage, the couple generally are not able to stay together for long and one of them has to return home to their country. The agonising waiting period then begins with both of them being miles apart and unable to fully cement their relationship. A few years pass by before the couple can actually start living together. Unfortunately, by this point a lot of issues may arise due to misunderstandings in communication or other distractions.

Even worse is when the children of immigrant parents are pressured or even forced to marry someone from "back home," creating a huge clash of cultural paradigms. These kinds of marriages, based on deceit and a complete lack of compatibility, hardly ever last. In severe cases, these sorts of situations have even led young people to

leave Islam, as they cannot tell apart what they see as cultural oppression and the reality of what religion requires. It is simply wrong to deceive people in this way.

INTENTIONS FOR MARRIAGE

An essential part of preparing for marriage, as with any action one undertakes, is to think about one's intention. Yes, there should be a worthy intention behind marriage. It is not just a social ritual that you must do when you get to a certain age. So what should the intention be when getting married? This needs a great deal of consideration and reflection. Are you doing it to stop people from bugging you about being single? Is it because all your friends have done it, so you feel you should too? Is it for a baby? Is it for a lawful outlet to your sexual frustrations? Surely these, though not illegitimate, are not by themselves sufficient reasons to take on this great commitment. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Actions are according to intentions, and everyone will get what they intend" (*Bukhārī*, 1; *Muslim*, 1907).

We know from the teachings of our religion that the purpose of life is to worship Allāh Most High. The loftiest of intentions, therefore, include seeking His guidance, good pleasure and reward. The act of marriage should ultimately be seen as an act of devotion and worship and a way of attaining closeness to Allāh. Furthermore, it is the *sunna* of the prophets and strongly recommended by our Messenger ﷺ. Once news reached him of a group of people who wanted to increase their worship. One of them declared that he would fast every day, another that he would spend his nights in prayer, and a third that he would never marry. So the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said to them, "Are you the ones who stated such and such? Listen, by Allāh, I am the most fearful and conscious of Allāh among you, yet I fast and I eat, I pray and I sleep, and I marry women. Whoever turns away from my *sunna* is not from me" (*Bukhārī*, 5063; *Muslim*, 1401). Hence, the intention to follow the Prophetic *sunna* is also extremely important.

After this, one can look at the more personal and specific intentions in getting married. As seen above, one of the key reasons for marriage is to protect one's chastity. This is not only for the sake of the individual but for the sake of the moral rectitude of society as a whole. Another important intention is procreation. There is a well-known ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ where he says, "Marry a woman who is very loving and fertile, for I will take pride in your great number over other nations" (*Abū Dāwūd*, 2050). The desire to have children is a natural human inclination. Intending to marry and have children, thus increasing the numbers of the Muslim community (*umma*) and fulfilling one's responsibilities as a parent for the sake of Allāh, is a sound intention, but one ought also to intend leaving behind progeny who are righteous and who will on the Day of Judgement be a source of delight to their parents. Put differently, having children is a blessing that carries great responsibility. Those who are blessed with fertility must also be sensitive to those who are not. Not every marriage will yield children, and the inability to have children is a barrier neither to a happy marriage nor to the pleasure of Allāh. Infertility is an extremely sensitive subject that affects many Muslim couples, and we will return to it in more detail in chapter 9.

If one's intention is sound and the correct religious guidance is followed in getting married, then whatever the circumstances may be, Allāh can place great *baraka* in a marriage. It may be that you have never even seen or spoken to your prospective spouse (though it is best to meet and find out about them, as we will see) and you are marrying someone you barely know, yet Allāh may place love and *baraka* between you. By making the right intention at the outset, you can be earning continuous rewards throughout your married life. Ibn 'Abbās ؓ narrates that the Prophet ﷺ said, "We have not seen for two people who love one another anything [as beneficial] as marriage" (*Ibn Māja*, 1847). So when a couple develop a liking or love for one another, marriage will provide the depth and inner spirit to that relationship, and save it from being harmful fornication.

By taking the time to thoroughly prepare for marriage, before one even begins to look for a prospective spouse, you can develop

your intentions, manage your expectations and thus start married life on the right foot. Take the time to figure out your role and responsibilities. Focus not only on reading about marriage, but about becoming a better person so that you can become a better spouse. Think deeply about what you want from married life and the kind of person you want to marry. Taking the time to develop these habits of mind will also help to avoid emotional entanglements when meeting prospective partners. Once you feel prepared to begin your search, make your family aware that you are ready to get married. The next few chapters will focus on some practical strategies for this process. Above all, you must have fear of Allāh Most High with regard to your marriage. Allāh is the one who will put the needed love and blessing between you and your spouse. Seeking His good pleasure should be at the heart of our affairs. Make abundant *duʿā* that He grants you a successful and blessed marriage. This will only happen if we act with sincerity and follow His guidance.



Chapter 3



WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A SPOUSE

When a person feels ready to get married, the next step is to find a future life partner. This chapter will focus on the qualities that one should look for in a prospective spouse, while chapter 4 will explore the practical steps to find one.

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “A woman is married for four things: her wealth, her lineage, her beauty and her religion. Be victorious with the one with religion (*fa-ʿẓfar bi-dhāt al-dīn*). May your hands be soiled” (*Bukhārī*, 5090; *Muslim*, 1466).

At the time that this statement was made, it appears that the Prophet ﷺ was addressing a gathering of men. It is for this reason that the narration focuses on the qualities sought in women, though of course a woman should similarly give thought to the qualities that she seeks in a husband. “May your hands be soiled,” which literally means “may you become needy,” was an idiomatic way in the Arabic of the time to admonish the listener against failing to seek out the right qualities and not an outright rebuke. The Prophet ﷺ is stating as a matter of fact that these are the four things people generally seek in a spouse, and putting faith last suggests that they commonly regard it as the least important. So the Prophet ﷺ is emphasising the importance of faith, and that it should be the primary consideration for anyone concerned with the betterment of their lot in this world and the hereafter, since it is a quality whose benefits extend to both.

The narration is not at all discouraging one from seeking the other qualities but merely expressing them as secondary to faith. Hence, in another ḥadīth he encourages a man to go and look at his prospective bride. Let us address each of these four qualities in turn and discuss the benefit, detriment and importance of each.

WEALTH

First is the quality of wealth. From a legal perspective, one of the responsibilities of a man in marriage is that he should provide financially for his wife and children. If a man looks to get married without the ability to spend on his wife, he is simply not ready to get married. A woman should not be expected to provide financial contributions when she comes to the marriage. This is the basic, foundational understanding of responsibilities. As mentioned earlier, the wife may make voluntary financial contributions. In such a situation, it is important to take note, for reasons of dividing inheritance upon death or in the event of divorce, of the respective shares each spouse has in the equity of their house or other personal property that they may have each contributed to in the marriage. If the wife has no income, all household assets are assumed to belong to the husband apart from the things he gives to her as a gift. More discussion of financial issues in a healthy marital relationship are discussed later.

Having a wealthy wife, whether due to her earnings or a wealthy family background, can seem appealing. A man looking for an easy, luxurious life could expect to enjoy expensive gifts, holidays and a generous inheritance for his children from their mother's side. The wife may already own a nice house and may have so much wealth that he need never worry about spending on her. Marrying a woman exclusively with these sorts of goals in mind, if perhaps unmanly, is permissible. A man should carry a chivalrous attitude toward breadwinning and should fully anticipate carrying the financial responsibility of his family. This is the role Allāh has designated for him. Allāh says,

﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ﴾

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allāh has preferred the one above the other and because they spend their wealth on them (Nisā', 4:34).

Whether his wife is a pauper or a millionaire, her upkeep is the sole responsibility of the husband. But there is no harm in having a righteous wife who is also wealthy. A wife with wealth, for reasons of compatibility, may be more suitable for a husband who comes from a wealthy background, as a disparity in wealth could lead to a mismatch of expectations.

LINEAGE

The second quality sought is lineage. In the time of the Prophet ﷺ and for generations before him, the Arabian tribes had taken much pride in tribal lineages. The importance of family standing and honour was paramount. In our postmodern neoliberal society where everything is focused on the individual, who you are, what you do and what you want, looking at a person's ancestry and the kind of family they come from can seem outdated. However, there is a great deal of wisdom in the Prophet's ﷺ inclusion of this aspect of lineage in this ḥadīth. As individual and independent as a person may be, a good family with good morals and manners will more likely give rise to children who have a noble and sound upbringing. A husband or wife who was brought up in a well disciplined and noble home by their parents would be expected to provide the same environment for their children. Looking at one's family background can thus reveal many things about the nature of a person.

People are influenced in many subtle ways, physically, psychologically and spiritually, by those they are related to and spend considerable time with. Humans are social beings, and much of both the nature and nurture that together contribute to the character of a person depend on the person's environment and family. An interest-

ing example of this comes from the ḥadīth mentioned earlier advising marriage to women who are “loving and fertile.” How would one know how fertile a woman is? Scholars commenting on this ḥadīth advise that one would look at the fertility of her mother, aunts, sisters and other female relatives, as such traits often run in families.

This is one example, but there are many other factors that through developments in genetics we are only beginning to find out now. In the time of the Prophet ﷺ, a bedouin came to dispute the parentage of a child that his wife had given birth to. The child was dark and he was convinced that this could not be his child. The Prophet ﷺ asked him, “Have you camels?” He replied, “Yes.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “What colour are they?” He replied, “They are red.” The Prophet ﷺ further asked, “Are any of them grey in colour?” He replied, “Yes.” The Prophet ﷺ asked him, “Whence did that greyness come?” He said, “I think it is a hereditary strain that has appeared.” So the Prophet ﷺ said, “Then perhaps this is also an inherited strain that has appeared” (*Bukhārī*, 5305, 7314; *Muslim*, 1500). So just as there is a possibility of a lone pigment trait dominating after generations, it is likely that certain hereditary dispositions and personal character traits can do the same.

Not only is the influence of family on the person getting married important, but it is also essential to remember that a marriage is not only between two individuals but also between two families. Whatever the family’s living situation and social circumstances may be, a couple will never live in a vacuum. It is vital to give consideration to the nature and influence of other family members, whether that be their religious practice, social attitudes and so on. It will inevitably have an effect on the health of the marriage and on the upbringing of children to some degree. Are these the sort of people who will come after you with baseball bats if there is a problem, or try to sue you for every penny you have, including the roof over your head, or are you confident that they will deal with you in a fair, honest and sensible manner? Are these the sort of people whose moral and religious commitment you are satisfied with and with whom you can envisage getting along? Marrying someone from a well-placed or

upper-class family, purely for the sake of bragging rights and without any consideration of other qualities and traits, is foolish.

BEAUTY

The third quality mentioned in the ḥadīth is beauty. In a world where beauty is too often exploited for immoral ends, we often forget that Allāh, the originator of all created beings, has created in the human being a natural inclination toward beautiful things. We see this when we gaze at the exquisite resplendence of the full moon, the way we are drawn to appreciate symmetry, complementary colours, and beautiful forms and landscapes. Indeed, it is mentioned in a ḥadīth, “Allāh is beautiful and He loves beauty” (*Muslim*, 147).

Similarly, we are wired with a natural attraction toward the beauty of the opposite gender. This serves the purposes of finding physical satisfaction and driving procreation. The beauty of the human form, however, is temporary. The vitality of youth fades and something or someone that one finds beautiful one day will not remain so the next. However, in an attempt to deal with the onslaught of immorality and commercialisation of beauty in our modern society, some often try to downplay beauty and this aspect of our human nature. They emphasise the fact that beauty fades and all that matters is one’s religious commitment. But you should not overlook being attracted to your spouse when considering a partner for marriage.

An incident comes to mind of one of the students in my class who had often read the above narration on the four qualities men seek in women and its emphasis on religious women. He had assumed it was dismissing the other qualities altogether and would keep repeating that he did not care what his wife looked like as long as she was pious. One of the more mature, married students in the class spoke to him telling him that he was wrong. He advised him by saying that when you go outside, you will see all sorts of adorned women, whether with real beauty or just done up to attract. You should consider someone you are attracted to and satisfies you visually too.

We live in a world where everyone is beautifying themselves. People spend inordinate amounts of time ensuring they are as attractive and beautiful as possible before going outside. Some cannot even allow themselves to be seen by others without makeup on. This is fuelled by a multi-billion-pound industry. In the context of where we live, it is not even possible to continuously look at the floor while outside and be protected. You will be travelling on the bus or train and sometimes there is no way to fully protect your gaze, even by looking down. So when you come home and you do not find the attraction and physical satisfaction you need, how long will your resolve last?

The great ḥadīth commentator 'Alī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1605) states, "That which has been related about a woman not being wed for her beauty is not a discouragement from considering beauty; rather it is a discouragement from marriage for the sake of beauty alone in spite of religious corruption" (*Mirqāt al-Mafātīḥ*, 5:2053). Similar statements are made by the two main commentators of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Badr al-Dīn al-'Aynī (d. 855/1453) and Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), where the latter even considers marrying for beauty as recommended as long as it is accompanied by faith (see 'Aynī, *Umdat al-Qārī*, 20:86; Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 9:135). Religiosity does not lie in denying our human nature; rather we refine our human nature through the example of the Prophet ﷺ. Beauty was praised in the following narration transmitted by Abū Umāma ؓ. The Prophet ﷺ used to say,

After being mindful of Allāh (*taqwā*), the next most superior thing a believing man benefits from is a righteous wife; she is obedient when he instructs her, pleases the eye when he looks at her, fulfils his oaths if he swears upon her, acts faithfully in his best interest concerning herself and his assets when he is absent (*Ibn Māja*, 1857).

"Pleases the eye when he looks at her" because of her external and internal beauty, which include both her personality and sex appeal. If you are just led by physical attraction you are bound to fail since you are not focused on connecting at a deeper level. So physical beauty without *taqwā* could lead to vainglory and pomposity and end up being a trial, while with *taqwā* it can be a light and source of endless joy.

This also reminds us that beauty is in the eye of the beholder: it is you who decides if you are attracted to your spouse, not your parents. Choosing a bride for your son is not a daughter-in-law competition. This is why, as we discuss further in the next chapter, it is advised to meet your prospective spouse and to see them to the extent that you are satisfied with the level of attraction. Of course, with time their youthful attraction and physical beauty will fade. A trophy spouse will no longer remain a trophy. One day he or she will be the most beautiful thing that you have ever seen, but maybe tomorrow you will see something more beautiful. You should pray that you will be able to say to your spouse after even forty years that she is beautiful and that your attraction to her will grow to be more than skin-deep.

RELIGION

All the above attributes are temporary and limited to this world. However, they all have the potential to be used in the right way to gain rewards for the hereafter, but they are not of any direct intrinsic value in the hereafter. While we do not ignore these attributes, we do have to recognise for this reason that religion is most important. The Prophet ﷺ told us that marrying someone for their religious commitment is the way to ultimate success in marriage, the way to become a winner. On this note, some time ago I penned a poem entitled *Fa 'zfar bi Dhāt al-Dīn*:

It is the quality that endures
Neither the beauty nor the wealth
Not even family lineage
As they all dissipate
Without any journey beyond
Only the *dīn* as it is the pillar
of virtue in both worlds
Shining the way forward with devotion
Traversing where the three do not
Fa 'zfar bi dhāt al-dīn

We live in a world where everyone is beautifying themselves. People spend inordinate amounts of time ensuring they are as attractive and beautiful as possible before going outside. Some cannot even allow themselves to be seen by others without makeup on. This is fuelled by a multi-billion-pound industry. In the context of where we live, it is not even possible to continuously look at the floor while outside and be protected. You will be travelling on the bus or train and sometimes there is no way to fully protect your gaze, even by looking down. So when you come home and you do not find the attraction and physical satisfaction you need, how long will your resolve last?

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So what does *dīn*, or religion, mean in this context? There is an outer expression of the faith, such as publicly taking part in religious activities or wearing the *ḥijāb*. Is that what is intended or is it more the internal character and conduct? I believe that since marriage is primarily a social interaction, it is more the inner dimensions of God-fearingness and good character and the praiseworthy traits such as compassion, contentment, generosity, patience and general piety that are intended. Hence, one of the qualities the Prophet ﷺ encouraged to look for in a spouse was to be “loving.”

So one of the most important factors when considering someone for marriage is undoubtedly how righteous he or she is and his or her religious ethos. If you truly want a happy marriage, you must choose someone who will treat you well because they know your rights and they realise that they are accountable to Allāh. With that in mind, it would make sense to marry a Muslim who is seeking the same qualities in their partner.

It is sometimes disastrous to marry someone primarily on the basis of their wealth, beauty or occupation, if they are not at your level in faith or practice, and then expect them to become practising at your level. Marrying someone with the expectation that they will change, whether you think that you will be able to “fix” them or based on their assurances that they will improve themselves, often leads to bitter disappointment. People may well change, but it could be for the worse and not for the better. You should not enter into marriage with these expectations. Old habits die hard and change must ultimately come from within.

To conclude, when looking for a spouse, pray for all four qualities mentioned in the ḥadīth. Allāh can give you all four and this is easy for Him. If you do find someone righteous who also possesses the three other factors, or even two or one of them, that is wonderful. But the quality of righteousness should be foremost. I leave you with two ḥadīths, which may have been judged weak but are full of wisdom to reflect on. The Prophet ﷺ said,

Whoever marries a woman for her honour, Allāh will only increase

him in degradation. Whoever marries her for her wealth, Allāh will only increase him in poverty. Whoever marries her for her lineage, Allāh will only increase him in lowliness. But whoever marries her only to lower his gaze, protect his chastity or tie his kinship, Allāh will bless her for him and bless him for her (Ṭabarānī, *Al-Muʿjam al-Awsaṭ*, 2342).

He ﷺ also said,

Do not marry women just for their beauty for perhaps her beauty would be the cause of her ruin [due to arrogance and narcissism]. Do not marry them just for their wealth for perhaps her wealth would be the cause of her tyranny. Rather marry her for her religion. . . . (*Ibn Māja*, 1859).

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A HUSBAND THEN?

Because the ḥadīth of the four attributes above apparently was addressed to an audience of men, the discussion has so far focused primarily on the qualities that a man seeks when looking for a wife. However, much of what has been written also applies to women when looking for a husband. A woman similarly looks for financial security, for a good family background, for physical attraction, and above all for a man of piety and religious commitment. A person came to Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] and said, “I have a daughter who has been proposed to by more than one suitor. To whom do you advise me to marry her?” He said, “Marry her to a man who is mindful of Allāh, for if he loves her he will honour her, and if he despises her he will [at least] not oppress her” (Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-Sunna*, 9:11).

However, to reference a well-known book on relationships, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, while we have certain things in common, men and women are also different in significant ways. A successful marriage requires an understanding and appreciation of these differences.

As such, for a woman looking for a spouse it is also important that

you choose someone that you can respect. As we will discuss later in the chapter on building a successful relationship, just as one of a woman's key emotional needs is affection and love, one of a man's key emotional needs is to be respected by his wife along with the need to be understood. In the Islamic model of family life, a husband is the head of the Muslim household, steering the course of the family. He is the shepherd of his family and holds a responsibility over them in the eyes of Allāh, just as a woman is the minister of the home and a shepherd to their children. The husband is not a boss or a tyrant but has a key role of guiding the family. A woman must be able to respect this responsibility that Allāh has placed upon her husband and allow him to fulfil it.

As an example, a woman who is well educated and brought up in the West may feel that a man with broken English arriving from a third world country is someone she cannot respect. With other women, this may not be such a deal-breaker, and she would have no problem with such a man, especially if he has a number of other qualities to compensate. Everyone has their own unique feelings. Respect here does not only refer to not being judgemental or discriminatory, rather the respect required from a relationship between spouses is something much deeper and requires deep trust and deference. She must judge for herself what is important to her in this regard.

There are many examples of marriages I have come across or helped deal with where these sorts of issues are at play, where a wife may have a superiority complex or the husband an inferiority complex, and the situation depends heavily on the temperaments and natures of the individuals involved. In one case, there were a couple who were both accomplished lawyers. However, it so happened that the wife's law degree was from a better institution than the husband's and this became a big issue for them. Not only this, but she had been brought up, in his words, "like a princess" with doting parents, and her husband was not able to keep up with everything she wanted. This caused endless misery in their relationship. These points may sound trivial to some, but these are real issues affecting couples, and they highlight the need for deep reflection on the compatibility of spouses.

Other examples include height and age. Some women feel that they cannot take seriously a man who is shorter or younger than they are. Again, these factors need not be a problem, and there are many marriages in which neither of these is an issue for the couple. But for some they may be important to consider. In many cases, it is better for a man to be both taller and older (some suggest even a seven-year difference as ideal). Psychologically, women tend to respect men who are a little older and thus perceived to be more mature. Conversely, women who are younger need worry less about staying attractive to their husbands. There is no hard-and-fast rule, but such practicalities are worth thinking about even if they appear to be of no concern right now.

OTHER GENERAL QUALITIES

Another attribute for both men and women to consider when looking for their future spouse is honesty. This is an extremely important quality. A married couple is so close to each other that it is not possible to keep secrets and hide things from one another—you *will* be found out. With time your spouse will know the smallest subtleties of your mood and behaviour. Lying will cause a huge breakdown in the relationship. It has been said that a good Muslim does not want to lie, while a very good Muslim does not need to lie.

It is important here to clarify a ḥadīth relating to this issue. Asmā' bint Yazīd ؓ relates that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "Lying is not permitted except in three cases: a man's speaking to his wife to make her happy; lying at times of war; and lying in order to reconcile between people" (*Tirmidhi*, 1939; see also, *Muslim*, 2605). Before anyone take this to be a general permission to start lying through their teeth to their spouse, I will try to clarify its intent as understood by religious scholars and in the context of other prophetic narrations. Ḥadīth scholars state that this does not permit the telling of white lies at all, but rather refers to making well-intended statements to attain the objectives of a good marital relationship. This is such as

saying, "You are my greatest love in the world," or "You are the most beautiful one in my eyes," and the like. Hence, the famous ḥadīth commentator Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998) explains that in such relationships, circumstances sometime arise in which words that go beyond the pale of reality may sometimes have to be said, to maintain the peace and mitigate any undue harm to the relationship. For instance, a man may express a greater amount of love than he feels in his heart for his wife to generate greater affection, love and reform between them (see *Maʿālim al-Sunan*, 4:123). While this type of conversation may be justified, lying cannot be used to abuse the spouse. The great ḥadīth master Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī relates an agreement of the scholars that lying can never be justified to usurp or deprive a spouse of their due rights (*Fath al-Bārī*, 5:300). Similarly, another well-known ḥadīth commentator, Imām Yahyā al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), clearly states, "What is intended by the husband lying to his wife or her lying to him is the expression of love or promise of something that is not binding, or the like. As far as employing deception to take what is not theirs or withhold what is due to the other, that is unlawful by consensus of the Muslims. And Allāh knows best" (*Sharḥ al-Nawawī ʿalā Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 16:158).

Lying is just bad policy and counterproductive. If your spouse discovers you are given to lying, they will doubt everything you say and do thereafter, and that destroys the underlying mutual trust needed for a successful relationship. Trust is a feeling. It is an experience and it has to be developed. It does not grow from a single act of kindness, but from the kindnesses you render with consistency. Brushing your teeth for an hour one day will not have the same benefit as brushing for two minutes twice a day every day. You do not want a feeling built up over time to be lost due to some mismanaged falsehood.

The issue of fertility has also been mentioned previously. We learnt in an earlier chapter that one of the intentions of marriage is to have children. Procreation is a big part of marriage. Thus, infertility is a possible reason for the rejection of a potential spouse. However, someone who has fertility issues is not cast away. The stigma surrounding those who are infertile (or likewise divorced) does not

have an Islamic basis and has no place in our communities. Fertility problems may have a health-related cause that can be overcome. In cases where it is permanent, there are many possible marital arrangements where this need not be a problem. Some people do not mind not having children. Some may be happy to adopt. In fact, there is an urgent need in our communities to address the issue of foster care for Muslim children who would otherwise go to non-Muslim families. Someone previously divorced may not want to have more children. The ḥadīth that encourages one to marry a fertile woman does not attack those who are infertile, and should not be so interpreted, but rather points toward the benefit of increasing the umma.

But as procreation is such an important part of marriage, infertility or erectile dysfunction (ED) is something that should be declared at the outset, as unforeseen ED or infertility can cause a marriage to break down. In the case that a husband suffers from ED (but not infertility), this is sufficient cause for the wife to go to legal arbitration to seek *khulʿ* and divorce (see chapter 10). The man would then be given a time period (a year) to seek medical help. If no treatment for his problem is possible, separation would be granted at her request. If the woman is infertile, there is room for considering a second marriage. She does not have to be divorced. While polygamy (used throughout the book to mean polygyny) may be a sensitive topic, there is no doubt that it offers a solution to many social problems, and will be discussed further in a later chapter.

Other attributes are having a lawful income, a reasonable level of maturity and intelligence, reliability and trustworthiness, hardworking nature, forgiveness and tolerance, humility and modesty, essential Islamic knowledge of rights and obligations, purity and cleanliness and generosity in wealth and affection.

The attributes discussed above are not exhaustive, but will give a person beginning their search for a spouse an idea of what they should be looking for. Now armed with this list of "ideal qualities," one of the most important things to remember is that you will never find a perfect person. Do not think that you are a princess and you are looking for your prince charming—this fairy-tale illusion will soon

break and you will inevitably be left disappointed. A man looking for a supermodel, Michelin-starred *shaykha* will find himself waiting for a very long time. Even if you believe you have found “the one,” your soulmate, a short while into the marriage the inevitable faults and shortcomings of the other person will come to light. What matters, then, is that you have chosen a spouse who has enough praiseworthy attributes and with whom you share sufficient compatibility to make the marriage work.

CULTURAL COMPATIBILITY

Some people take the list of attributes in the above ḥadīth as the complete list of legitimate qualities to pursue, specifically treating other things like cultural background as unimportant. In fact, some are so hostile to culture that they attack their parents as backward for emphasising it. This sort of attitude reflects a level of ignorance regarding the place of culture in human life.

It is true that we are instructed to facilitate marriage if people are of sound religious commitment. Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه relates that the Prophet ﷺ said, “If a person whose religious standing and conduct you are satisfied with comes to you with a proposal, accept his proposal. If you do not, trial will afflict the earth and corruption will become widespread” (*Tirmidhī*, 1084). This ḥadīth does not have to be taken literally in the sense that if you find someone with the above qualities, you must accept his proposal and give your daughter to him in marriage. It may well be that the ḥadīth is taken in the context of someone who is culturally suitable, but lacks certain secondary qualities that you value over all others.

It may well be that you are brought up here in the West and share a common understanding of British (or US, European, or other) culture with many other Muslims from various ethnicities and ancestral cultures. It may well be that your family would be open-minded enough for you to choose a person from any background. However, as mentioned previously, marriage is not only between

the two individuals but also between two families. Are the families as compatible as the couple? Can they get along? There are in fact numerous benefits to marrying someone from a similar culture. What if your parents have weaker English and you want your children to learn and speak with them in your parents’ mother tongue, or you just want them to learn it as a second language? Or you prefer the dress, food, customs, traditions and traits of your culture? Or you just don’t want to learn about a new culture? With the same culture you would be better informed of their expectations and more easily fit into the spouse’s wider family.

Islam is a social religion, and our social life is not confined to the nuclear family. The modern emphasis on individualism, together with the breakdown of a family-oriented culture, is causing many social problems. Young mothers who are home alone with small children often feel the brunt of this, without the wider “tribe” for support and interaction, which can contribute to extreme loneliness and, in some cases, depression. A family life with only two individuals would soon see them getting bored with each other. On the most joyous of occasions, at ‘Id time, at births, weddings, graduations, and return from pilgrimage or holidays, the extended family gathers. It is the mundane issues of life, the interactions with our extended family and our wider circle of contacts, our mutual understanding of one another, the customs we partake in and the family traditions we build that make up the stuff of life. It is these small things that make all the difference. Some family members, especially if you are from a “traditional” or “cultural” family, may be very sensitive about these issues, which may seem to you to be mundane and unimportant at present. Marrying someone who is in tune with these small details will make things a lot easier. We are told in the Qur’ān:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا
إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed,

the most noble of you in the sight of Allāh is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allāh is Knowing and Acquainted (Hujurāt, 49:13).

People all around the world have their own unique cultures and traditions, and getting to know one another, or *ta'aruf* as mentioned in the verse, is very important. When one travels and gets to know people, their history, dialects, culture, cuisine and idiosyncrasies, this is when one truly connects with other people. The small things do matter and the world is not as much of a global village as social media might suggest. When one marries into a family, making the small efforts to connect with one's in-laws, to build bridges and to join in the ordinary things of life, is what will help to facilitate harmonious family relations.

Having said all of this, there is nothing Islamically wrong with marrying outside of your culture. In fact, some may even take the verse above to refer to the praiseworthiness of getting to know people of other tribes and nations and to mix with them. However, this can be difficult. This difficulty is a real and practical issue and should not be overlooked. Some of the potential problems may well be overcome somewhat by the fact that we live in the British (or Western) context and the situation will change from generation to generation. But an approach that some have to finding a potential spouse, trying to avoid all potential "cultural baggage," does not take into consideration the importance of culture in human life.

There is a specific example of such a situation I encountered, where a friend wanted to marry a decent girl (as all men do) and was looking for someone who did not come with "cultural baggage." Of course, "cultural baggage" is a loaded and vague term. The baggage in each person's case will be different depending on their culture. Basically, he did not want to marry anyone who felt obliged to adhere to all aspects of culture to such a degree that it would encroach on their freedom to live as a healthy couple. With that in mind, and after sifting through many prospective women, he eventually thought he had found the right person. He was of Indian origin while she was of Bangladeshi background, though both were born and brought up in the UK.

Some of the agreements he made with her and her family were that he would not be obliged to visit the in-laws at certain customary times, or go to stay over at the wife's house after the marriage for a few days according to Bangladeshi tradition, or to observe particular customs at the wedding ceremony. She also assured him that she was not a very cultural person and hated all such demands. Similarly, she would not be obligated to observe some typical Indian traditions or to serve his parents. In fact, he had proactively mentioned to his mother that he was marrying this woman as a wife for himself and not to serve his mother as it was his responsibility to serve his mother and not his wife's. He wanted a marriage purely based on "Islamic tenets" and with no other intrusive customs.

While the motivation behind this may have been sound and praiseworthy, it turns out that this does not work in real life, nor can it qualify as even fully Islamic. Social demands and norms are inescapable. Both felt compelled to observe certain social situations. The wife felt obliged to attend her sister's childbirth and be the first at the hospital. The husband felt compelled to regularly visit his parents, as they lived just a few doors away, and eat with them, along with assisting in the preparation of the meals at times. Naturally, he did not go alone but pressured his wife to join. Eventually, he discovered that their agreement had been too ambitious, and ultimately regretted looking for a wife based on his initial criteria. He felt that he would have been better off with a sociable wife who was domesticated to cultural life, one who had no qualms with being part of the extended family, and one willing to fulfil the social family demands that came with this. One cannot really abandon communal and social demands from influencing one's marriage. These are very powerful factors and have to be accommodated, unless you want to be isolated from the rest of society. Carefully considering someone's cultural compatibility is therefore very important.

Even at the most basic level of religious compatibility is the issue of a husband and wife following a different viewpoint, *madhhab*, or school of Islamic law, especially if one is an overzealous follower with an exclusivist mind set. This can become a source of difficulty

when the day-to-day demands of life are taken into consideration. I came across an example of a couple where the husband was of Salafi mindset while the wife was Hanafi in *madhhab*, and they constantly bickered about all sorts of minor issues. Although not very serious in and of themselves, all of these small issues built up over time to create a much larger problem of discord and friction in their marriage. In one of the cases, the husband even charged his wife with unbelief (*kufri*) and finally divorced her. This is not to say that people from different viewpoints or *madhhabs* cannot have a successful marriage (I know several), but rather that when they marry they should be fully aware of the practical implications of their choice of spouse. Think about compatibility not only in broad terms but by looking at specific, practical realities, such as how the children will be brought up and what school of law they will be taught.

Another idea that has to be dispelled is the belief held by some that it is easier to marry a new Muslim of a different ethnicity rather than someone from their own, as they come with no “baggage.” Many men and women therefore emphasise that they are specifically looking for a convert. In reality, everyone has baggage of one kind or another. Converts may in fact have more issues due to sometimes having their non-Muslim extended family in the picture. There is nothing wrong with marrying a convert. In fact, it is praiseworthy in many cases. However, one needs to dispel the notion that marrying someone from your own culture or someone born as a Muslim will end up in disaster. You may have had or witnessed a bad experience with one person from your culture, but that does not mean you simply delete the rest of humanity or assume that everyone of a particular cultural background behaves in the same way.

Similar issues arise with Muslim men marrying Christian and Jewish women for the same sorts of reasons of wanting to avoid “cultural problems,” saying, “Muslims come with baggage.” Whether a genuine claim or excuse to marry someone they have met, such an attitude is juvenile and offensive. Out of the hundreds of thousands of Muslim girls, you could not think well of any one of them? Sometimes such a marriage is with the pretension of bringing the

wife into Islam. The problem with this is that, more often than not, the husband does not try very hard to guide his wife to the faith and is very weak himself. His commitment to his faith is completely uninspiring. It is not uncommon to hear of a woman converting to Islam through her, previously, boyfriend and now, husband, then learning about the faith and becoming significantly more practising than the husband, leading to many marital issues and potentially divorce as she is not satisfied with his religious commitment.

A Muslim woman may only marry a Muslim man. The reason for this is that the husband generally is in the position of influence and it could be hoped that the wife would eventually embrace Islam. Despite the validity of a Muslim man marrying women of either the Christian or Jewish faiths, such marriages are not encouraged. Scholars have even considered these marriages prohibitively disliked and sinful when the couple live in a non-Muslim country, where the disbelief of both the wife and the surrounding society may severely impact the family. The second caliph ‘Umar ؓ instructed the Companion Ḥudhayfa ؓ to divorce his Jewish wife. The great Makkan exegete and jurist ‘Aṭā’ ibn Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114/732) said it was disliked and explained that its lawfulness depended on a shortage of Muslim women to marry (Ibn Abī Shayba, *Al-Muṣannaf*, 3:475). Imām Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795) reportedly said, “I dislike marriage with the women of the People of the Book: Jewish and Christian, but I do not consider it unlawful.” He then goes on to explain that she may consume pork or wine (which is allowed in her faith) and the husband would kiss her and make love to her in that state (Mālik, *Al-Mudawwana*, 2:219). Imām Bayhaqī relates from Jābir ؓ, “We married them during the opening of Kūfa with Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqās when we could hardly find Muslim women. However, upon return we divorced them.” He then said, “They do not inherit from Muslim men nor them from her. However, their women are lawful for us [for marriage] but our women are not lawful for them” (Bayhaqī, *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 13980).

Marrying people of other faiths many times poses great heartache and difficulties, especially when children enter the equation. The issue

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of how the children will be nurtured and brought up may be resolved to a certain degree, but the children may still be influenced by the other faith. Furthermore, agreements and promises can be made on how to raise the children during the marriage contract, but what happens if the marriage breaks down? I personally know of more than one case where a long-term interfaith marriage irretrievably broke down and the wife returned to her church, taking the children with her in spite. You can imagine the type of horror this creates for even a nominally practising Muslim. Custody laws in the West generally favour the mother and the father is nearly always the loser. This is another reason why interfaith marriages are highly discouraged.

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As we can see, there are many issues at play when it comes to what to look for in a spouse. We are advised by Islamic teachings to prefer someone who is religious but not that all other traits should be ignored; the matter is in fact much more complex than this. The reality of who we are, what we want, and who we will practically be able to live a happy life with are questions that require much reflection.

Before we get married, we need to make the right choice of partner, with the right priorities. Marriage is a major undertaking, a big milestone and a point of change in life. In our time, it is an even greater decision than it may have been for previous generations, and we must take time to make the right choice in a considered manner. Prepare yourself and think carefully about whom you want to marry, for the sake of both your worldly life and your life in the hereafter. Based on what you have read above and on your own desires and needs, make a list of what you deem to be “essential” qualities and a list of “desirable” qualities. You will never find someone perfect, nevertheless someone who ticks all of the essentials, but only some of the desirables, should be given due consideration. Once you feel you know the kind of person you are looking for, the next stage is to practically go about finding them and making enquiries, which is the subject of the next chapter.



Chapter 4



HOW TO FIND A SPOUSE

OUR CONTEXT

In Western society, most people are not married. We live with an unprecedented level of openness around us. The reality we encounter is very different to that of other parts of the world: premarital cohabitation, children born out of wedlock, various sexual orientations, and the ever-presence of sex through social media and various other technologies enabled by the internet. This is our reality, so how do we deal with it?

In the current climate it is very easy to hook up with somebody and to engage in casual illicit relationships and pre-marital sexual activity (*zinā*). A common model is for people to have long-term partners and delay marriage indefinitely. The argument is that this allows them to test the person, to get to know them thoroughly before deciding that they are the right one to commit to. But then, we see so many of these late marriages failing. This is not because the couple don't know each other, but after the honeymoon period is over and the defects of the other person become clear, the novelty of being married soon wears off. How is being married any different to how they were living before? There seems to be no reason to stay together. In fact, studies have shown that having multiple partners and being in and out of relationships decrease your chances of staying together in the long run and increase your chances of divorce if you

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do eventually marry. One study showed that women who married as virgins had the lowest divorce rates by far and that premarital sex with even one partner substantially increased the odds of divorce.¹ You could say that the dating and sex-before-marriage-culture is akin to a sticky tape that you paste on one surface, pull it off, stick on another surface, and so on until it loses its adhesiveness and no longer sticks properly.

This practice is not an option for practising Muslims, as any kind of romantic relationship or intimacy requires marriage. How then are you supposed to know if a person is right for you? What about their defects that will only come to light later? In the Islamic model for marriage, a person should still do their due diligence in looking for a partner with whom they share common life goals and compatibility. After marriage, the fact that you do not know them as well as you would have had you been dating them, means you will inevitably come up with some surprises. But when you come to face these issues you will already be tied by marriage. In fact, you would be heavily invested in it and you would do your best to make it work. Thomas Paine (d. 1809) said, "That which we obtain too easily, we esteem too lightly. It is dearness only which gives everything its value."

I know of no couple who do not have any issues. The problem with serial dating is that it conditions you to flee from commitment and expect failure in the relationship. After a short while you may notice a fault in your dating partner, at which point you can decide to move on to someone else. This situation leads to endless broken hearts. Most often it is women who are taken advantage of. Marriage allows you to really evaluate your feelings for each other and to seriously build your relationship. The Islamic model of avoiding premarital relationships and upholding the sanctity of marriage serves to protect the individual from such heartache and problems, and to create a morally upright society. In fact, recent research about religion and

¹ See Nicholas H. Wolfinger, Counterintuitive Trends in the Link Between Premarital Sex and Marital Stability, June 6, 2016, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/counter-intuitive-trends-in-the-link-between-premarital-sex-and-marital-stability> (accessed 13/11/2018).

relationship stability conducted in the UK has shown that British Muslim women are more likely to be happily married than those from other backgrounds and "Muslims in arranged marriages have many of the ingredients for a really successful long-term marriage."¹

When looking for a marriage partner, one must observe the proper etiquette of gender interaction. Some families may be more lenient than others in this regard; however, it is only when we stick to Islamic guidelines that Allāh will place blessing in the process and in the marriages that result. It is not the appropriate decorum for either men or women to directly approach one another, especially young couples looking to get married for the first time. There is just too much that could get out of hand or the likelihood of a silly blunder due to inexperience, either leading to something unlawful or jeopardising the marriage altogether. To make a careful and considered decision, one should have someone else in the picture. In the marriage of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, it was Lady Khadija who made the proposal. She had hired him to work for her and was impressed by his honesty and capability. Even though she was a confident woman, a successful merchant, experienced with prior marriage, and was older than him, she still sent a messenger for the proposal. Their respective family elders then got involved for the marriage to be organised.

IDENTIFYING A POTENTIAL SPOUSE

The biggest challenge for many people is simply to identify the right person for marriage in the first place. One way to find a person may work for some and not for others. One of the issues we face in our communities is that not too many people are arranging marriages any more. Traditionally, aunts, uncles and other community elders would be involved in matchmaking with the ability to synchronise details and make suitable suggestions based on a pool of young

¹ <http://marriagefoundation.org.uk/muslim-women-have-winning-recipe-for-relationship-success> (accessed 13/11/2018).

people they would know in the locality or through family networks. Now fewer people are doing it for various reasons. People are now increasingly individualised and communities have become fragmented. Sometimes we don't even know our neighbours anymore. It could be that a young Muslim man and woman, perfectly suited to each other and both seeking marriage, could be living on the same street and not know it. Matchmakers also often get blamed when their arrangements don't work out. To fill the void, a plethora of matchmaking apps and websites and "*halal* speed-dating" events have popped up in recent years. Despite this, many still struggle to find someone for marriage. How can there be so many eligible, decent women and men who search for so many years without ever getting married? What is the best way forward?

Your parents and extended family and relatives may or may not be able to help. It really depends on their circles of contacts and acquaintances and whether enquiries through these routes would lead to someone compatible for you. Many of the youth feel that if they receive a suggestion from their relatives, they should run in the other direction. The mature approach, however, is to fairly consider any matches they suggest. You still make the final decision, and you may well be pleasantly surprised. You can also look to older friends, local scholars or teachers. A friend who has recently gotten married, for example, may be able to make suggestions through the friends of their spouse. Local mosque *imāms* can also be consulted, though I do not know of many who actually maintain a database of suitable matches.

Matchmaking events and websites, dating apps and social media groups now seem to be taking the place of the aunts and uncles in the community, yet they essentially commodify what had previously been a free community service. These online tools make introductions, sometimes using complex algorithms, between possibly compatible people, just as their relatives and friends once did, only now with a fee attached. That said, we cannot discount the value that some of these sites bring to the marketplace of marriage, as it were, and some of them are made by Muslims with sound intentions. There are

many different services, some less appropriate than others. Some are window-shopping portals with an immense amount of eye candy, so these should be avoided. Some are very good and are more particular and thorough in what they feature to ensure that you will not be wasting your time. There is no problem in using these if a level of caution and the correct etiquette is observed. It is reprehensible to use them to find someone to flirt with, to contact multiple candidates that you are not really interested in or just to browse through them and gawp at the images. Our digital age is a time bombarded with social media, and more and more services are online. If these facilities provide an avenue for some to find a spouse in a lawful way, this is fine.

This avenue may be useful for converts, for example, who face unique challenges. Without an extended Muslim family and often without sensitive community support, many converts do not know where to begin. Some of these issues are no longer unique to converts, considering all of the cultural and societal shifts that our communities are experiencing. However, it may still be the case that converts face a discriminatory attitude when making proposals. Certain communities are more easy-going when it comes to giving their daughters away in marriage. From my experience, the Moroccan community, especially in Morocco, is one of the best and most open-minded in allowing men of other ethnicities to marry their women. They treat the matter simply and are very mature in this regard. Other communities should also strive for this kind of attitude. Eliminating racism and discriminatory attitudes is something we must all strive for, but change takes time.

INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS

Whether your parents are the ones to find a potential match for you or you are able to identify someone through another means, there is no doubt that they should be involved in the process as early on as possible. Your parents probably know you better than anyone else,

and they ultimately have your best interests at heart. You should find someone that your parents are also happy with so that you all may be happy. You may well feel independent now, but marriage is not just about the couple. There are many times in life that you will need a smooth and welcoming family environment to fall back on. Parents' prayers are extremely valuable, and this is what you will want to receive from them.

When it comes to something as significant as marriage, you cannot always rely on your instincts. Emotions are inevitably going to be involved to some extent, and you can't always make the right decision rationally. There have been many cases where problems have come up during the process of getting to know someone, but one or the other suitor can't emotionally let go. Such emotional entanglements should be avoided as they can lead to much heartache. When you are emotionally embroiled in a situation, you will not be able to think straight and will end up blind to all the other important and relevant aspects that need to be considered. The advice is to be rationally committed but emotionally aloof until the marriage is all but concluded. This can be extremely difficult, but place your hopes in Allāh to assist you. Having parents and pious family members as part of the process, who can give objective advice with a sound mind, is also a big help.

Unfortunately, parents can sometimes bring up trifling issues of their own. There are exceptional situations where they can be very uptight, obstructive and have strong cultural biases that prevent a person getting married or finding someone suitable. This does not refer to reasonable objections to the suitability of the person you are suggesting. Rather, they may insist that you first complete a PhD or that your suitor be from a certain village or class or a relative of the family. In such circumstances, your parents are clearly part of the problem, and you should seek advice on how to proceed in your specific situation from a local scholar or elder that you can trust.

You of course have the right to firmly and politely refuse a certain proposal put to you by your parents. In some schools of law, it is permissible for a father to marry off adult virgin daughters without

their permission, but in the Ḥanafī school this is not allowed and full permission must always be sought. For a family to arrange a marriage with consent of the young couple or to encourage them to get married is fine, but a forced marriage is something altogether different. Forcing someone to get married is not permissible, and these kinds of marriages can destroy young people. In many cases, they are threatened, emotionally blackmailed, or face being shunned if they do not comply. I have heard stories of mothers going on a hunger strike if their son or daughter refuses to marry their cousin. Such circumstances have even caused people to leave Islam because those pressuring them use religious justifications, and the victims then think that religion demands such oppression of them.

We have a problem in some communities where matches are made between cousins, and the matches may well be made before the young people are even aware. It is fine to suggest a match between cousins if the couple themselves agree when they are of discerning age and they are happy with it. But if there is coercion or abuse this must be stopped. People who find themselves in these situations must seek help. A bride who is told that she is visiting "back home" for a family wedding in the summer might soon realise it is going to be *her* wedding. These young victims may feel that they cannot even go to the police, as the culprits are their own parents, and there is a degree of emotional blackmail. However, those who engage in this abusive behaviour should be reported to the relevant authorities so that we can eradicate it from the community. These sorts of cultural elements come into play even in seemingly educated homes, and it is nearly always women who get the worst out of such forced marriages.

The phenomenon of pressuring young people to marry, however, affects not only young women. I was recently called by a young man whose parents pressured him into marrying someone from "back home" and she moved over to live with them. After repeatedly telling his parents of their incompatibility and the fact that he did not like her, his parents gave him an ultimatum, to either stay with her or to leave home. He decided to leave and lived away from his family for over two years without them reaching out to him. Wanting to patch

things up, he arranged for an uncle to get involved and organised a mediated meeting, but he found his parents to be unrelenting. Even after two years, they were as stubborn as ever, and they simply would not budge.

Then there is the story of the couple who had been married for a decade or so. The wife was of Pakistani descent, the husband of Bangladeshi descent. For years their families had been unhappy with their marrying outside the home culture. While the husband's family had finally reconciled with him, the wife's father had disowned her, never visited his grandchildren or allowed them into his house, and even forbidden her mother and siblings from visiting her.

When the husband came to consult with me, he clearly showed remorse about what they had done and acknowledged that they had acted in haste during their youth. He said that, in hindsight, it would have been better for them not to have married each other, but now with a few children between them and no other major problems in their marriage, a divorce would be the wrong thing to do. The husband was seeking solutions but there was not much they could do besides pray sincerely to Allāh Most High to change the heart of the wife's father. The most disturbing part to me was his stubborn unforgiving nature. It may have been understandable for him to be upset with her for going against his wishes for a while, but not to remain unrelenting after a decade and a few grandchildren. What she had done may have been ill-advised, but she had not fornicated or committed anything unlawful (*ḥarām*). Yet, his cultural narrative did not allow him to budge from his stance and led him to disown her. Sadly, many other such examples exist, some more severe than this one.

If you have someone you wish to marry but your parents do not approve, you must judge very carefully whether what you are asking for is reasonable. What are their concerns? Why are you so attached to this particular person that there seems not to be anyone else in the entire world for you? You may eventually discover that the person is not really right for you in the long run. However, if you believe yourself to have found someone practising perfectly suited for you

and believe you are in the right, you have the mighty task of trying to win your parents over. You must seek guidance from Allāh through the *istikhāra* prayer. The *istikhāra* process is very powerful. Essentially you are asking Allāh through it to help you decide and then facilitate whatever is the best option for you. I will discuss the *istikhāra* process in detail a bit later.

If you really want something, there is hardly anything more powerful than sincere prayers to Allāh Almighty at *tahajjud* time. So engage in abundant supplications to Him while also persevering in trying to win your parents over. The goal is to get their love for you to dominate over their love for their culture and thinking of "what people will say." You must become a loving, caring, dutiful child and continue to make your point respectfully. If your parents do come around and agree, then thank Allāh.

Of course, you must give yourself a reasonable time limit for this. You cannot wait for ever for your parents to agree. Give yourself a month, three months, maybe even a year. You must convince yourself to move on if things do not work out. Otherwise, you could be letting other opportunities pass by as you chase ghosts.

However, if it all fails and a person decides to marry without their parent's approval or consent, will the marriage be valid? According to the Shāfi'i school, such a marriage would be invalid for a woman who had never married before. The Ḥanafī school sees such a marriage for a woman without parental consent as essentially valid, though some of their jurists have deemed it slightly disliked (not sinful) as long as the parents are not being unreasonable and refusing someone who is beneficial and suitable (Sughdī, *Al-Nutafī 'l-Fatāwā*, 2:810). However, if there is a major mismatch (according to compatibility criteria determined by scholars), her father has an option to dissolve the marriage through a Shari'a court in Muslim countries or through a Shari'a arbitration panel in non-Muslim countries.

The marriage being valid does not mean I always suggest it. It is a serious decision to marry without the approval of one's parents and it can lead to many social problems. Some young people, for example, simply get married without their parents' knowledge, in

the hope that they will be able to convince them later to accept it. There is generally no civil ceremony included in such matrimony and therefore no recourse to any kind of legal accountability when things go wrong. This is a sure-fire way to have your heart broken and to destroy family ties in the process.

Sometimes a marriage like this is certainly better than the couple being engaged in an unlawful relationship. Marrying to protect oneself from some inevitable *ḥarām* cannot be argued with. While this may be the case, more often than not it is just some man taking a poor girl for a ride. When the relationship can no longer be sustained, he simply utters a *ṭalāq* (divorce) and disappears, with no sense of responsibility. Meanwhile she is left in the lurch, heartbroken, helpless, and feeling used with no assistance. She may be pregnant or already have a child or more, and she is left with no recourse to anything, treated as if she had just had a boyfriend.

Young women need to resist being tricked by flirtatious behaviour and sweet words directed toward them outside of marriage. Are they really sincere? Does he really mean it when he compliments you? Men are good salesmen. A woman contributes her sexuality in return for security. If she does all the giving and he continues to receive but not provide security through marriage, it leads to an unnatural state and cannot last. If a man is keeping you waiting for years and years, you need to wake up to the reality that there is a reason why he will not marry you. A real man who truly cares about you would not treat you as his plaything but would take responsibility and make a commitment to you.

You may be very emotionally attached to this person, and feel that they are your "soul mate" and that you are made for each other. The truth is that a semblance of "love" before marriage may simply be infatuation and lust. There is a difference between love and lust. Lust is merely the love of a body for a body. Falling in love may come about gradually or it may be sudden; it depends on the state of the lover and the nature of the beloved. But love requires all that is in human beings, and all the constituent parts and faculties of human beings must eventually participate in the inclination toward the

beloved. Therefore, many times true love comes after a commitment to marriage, and one cannot always truly claim to be a "soul mate" with someone until one has truly lived, loved and sacrificed for and been with one's spouse for many years.

Furthermore, marrying discreetly without the knowledge of family or community will put you in a place of accusation and suspicion when you interact with your spouse. Even if many people do not care (or even encourage interaction outside of marriage), there will be others who will look on with suspicion and consider it a sinful practice. Putting yourself in places of suspicion is to be avoided. How long would you want to live like this? 'Umar ؓ said, "Whoever places themselves in a place of suspicion, he should then not rebuke the one who thinks bad about him" (*Kharā'itī, Makārim al-Akhlāq*, 477).

WHAT IS LOVE AND FALLING IN LOVE?

Before moving on, let us take a moment here to understand love a bit more. According to some experts, love cannot be defined exactly, because there is something in love, as there is in pain, that cannot be conveyed in words. Love is not a tangible thing: one can recognise a pen or a deer by its name alone, but one cannot come to know the entire truth of love by means of its description alone. However, according to Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, a specific definition of love can be derived from the Qur'ān. Allāh says human love for one another is "an inclination towards beauty after being pleased (*i'jāb*) by it." Allāh's love for man is "for Him to draw him nearer to Himself by warding off distractions and sins from him, and purifying his inner being from the turbidity of this worldly life, and drawing back the veil from his heart so that he may behold Him, as though he sees Him with his heart." Finally, man's love for Allāh is "his inclination towards attaining the perfection which he utterly lacks and needs." He then defines falling in love as "the systematic inclination of a person's constituent parts and faculties towards beauty, after having

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been pleased by it." So ultimately, every part of a person must incline toward the beloved. (For the detailed discussion, see his seminal study *Love in the Holy Qur'an*, chaps. 3 and 23.)

TAKING THINGS FORWARD

If you do happen to find someone you are interested in, how are you supposed to take things forward? Ten different people sought for advice would give ten different responses, as there simply isn't one way to go about it. As a general model there are a few steps that can be taken:

1. Before making any contact, do some research if you can to find out about the person and their family;
2. Exchange basic details through a third party, for instance, a CV or brief profile;
3. Seek advice and counsel (*mashwara*) with your family and perhaps teachers and trusted friends;
4. Ask Allāh through the *istikhāra* prayer;
5. (For sisters) perhaps ask a male member of your family to meet with the potential candidate first to determine suitability;
6. Arrange a family meeting for the proposal where you can sit with the person and discuss any important questions you have and the families can get to know each other;
7. Arrange further meetings if necessary and keep repeating the *istikhāra* prayer;
8. Make a decision to decline or to go ahead without unnecessary delay. Accept the outcome if your proposal is declined. Do not lose hope even if you have a negative experience or receive multiple rejections.

We will now look at these steps in turn.

THE BACKGROUND CHECK

When you identify someone you are interested in for marriage and wish to take things forward, the first thing that is needed is background research. You can make inquiries yourself and wait to tell your family or you can get them involved from this stage. This comes before making any contact with the prospective or their family. One doesn't simply spot a lovely-looking sister at an Islamic event and rush up to romantically ask for her father's phone number. You should try to find out as much as possible about them through a third party. But be wary about who you ask. Only consult those you trust to keep your confidence and give you honest answers. Find out about the suitor's family, their friends, what kind of person he or she is and the sort of reputation they have. You should do your due diligence at this stage, as it makes little sense to declare your interest to them if an obvious source of incompatibility exists. Do not arrange meetings only then to decline upon finding out something that could easily have been found out before. This can be a cause of severe problems for the person and for their family. One family I know of introduced their daughter to over nine suitors, only then for the real issue to come to the surface: she was not even interested in getting married at the time.

After the background check, you should have a better idea of whether or not they are suitable for you. If the answer is positive you can in a subtle way somehow try to find out if they are also interested in marriage. If you are keen to proceed inform them of your interest. As in the example of Lady Khadija ؓ, this is best done through a messenger, who could be a family friend, a relative or a local *imām* or teacher. Doing things in the right way, with the fear of Allāh at heart, will bring more blessing into the whole process. Good communication with your family is essential as well as having them involved from an early stage. Different cultures have their own ways in this regard.¹ At this time one can also begin the prayer of *istikhāra*.

¹ In one West African culture, I discovered that a man is not allowed to speak to any older male relative, such as his father or older brother, about marriage, but only to

THE ISTIKHĀRA PRAYER

Istikhāra means “to seek that which is good, the better of two things, or the blessing or favour in something.” A wisdom states, “The one who does *mashwara* (consults) does not lose and the one who does *istikhāra* does not regret.” When a person needs to make decisions in life or needs blessings in something they are undertaking, for instance, marriage, buying property, starting a business, undertaking a journey, or any other matter, he should perform two *rak'as* of prayer and then recite the following *du'ā'*:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْتَخِيرُكَ بِعِلْمِكَ وَأَسْتَقْدِرُكَ بِقُدْرَتِكَ وَأَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ فَضْلِكَ الْعَظِيمِ، فَإِنَّكَ تَقْدِرُ وَلَا أَقْدِرُ وَتَعْلَمُ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ، اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ خَيْرٌ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أُمْرِي، فَاقْضُ لِي فِيهِ وَبَسِّرْهُ لِي ثُمَّ بَارِكْ لِي فِيهِ، وَإِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ شَرٌّ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أُمْرِي، فَاصْرِفْهُ عَنِّي وَاصْرِفْنِي عَنْهُ، وَاقْدِرْ لِي الْخَيْرَ حَيْثُ كَانَ، ثُمَّ أَرْضِنِي بِهِ

Allāhumma innī astakhīruka bi 'ilmika wa astaqdiruka bi qudratika wa as'aluka min faḍlika 'l-ʿaẓīm(i), fa innaka taqdiru wa lā aqdiru wa ta'lamu wa lā a'lamu, wa Anta 'Allāmu 'l-ghuyūb(i), Allāhumma in kunta ta'lamu anna “*bādhā 'l-amra*” khayrul li fī dīnī wa ma-ʾashī wa ʾāqibati amrī, fa 'qdurhu li wa yassirhu li, thumma bārik li fiḥ(i), wa in kunta ta'lamu anna “*bādhā 'l-amra*” sharrul li fī dīnī wa ma-ʾashī wa ʾāqibati amrī, fa 'srifhu 'annī wa 'srifnī 'anhu, wa 'qdur liya 'l-khayra ḥaythu kān(a), thumma arḍinī bih.

O Allāh, I ask of You the good through Your knowledge and I ask You to enable me through Your power and ask for Your favour of infinite bounty, for surely, You have power and I have none, You know all and I know nothing, and You are the Knower of all that is hidden. O Allāh, if in Your knowledge “*this matter*” be good for my faith, my livelihood and the outcome of my affairs in the

women or younger men. However, people did still end up marrying. Cultures work in their own ways.

world and the next, ordain it for me and facilitate it for me and grant me blessing in it. But, if in Your knowledge “*this matter*” is bad for my faith, my livelihood and the outcome of my affairs in the world and the next, turn it away from me and turn me away from it, and ordain for me the good wherever it be, and cause me to be pleased with it (*Bukhārī*, 1162).

When reaching the words “this matter” (*bādhā 'l-amra*), you should think about the matter for which you are seeking a decision or blessing.

As can be seen, the supplication is very comprehensive and powerful. In it you pray that, if the thing being sought is good for you, it be facilitated for you and you be blessed therein—and not that it just be given to you. However, if it is harmful then you pray that it be taken away from you and also that you be taken away from it. This part is especially helpful in providing relief from emotional attachment to something that is not to be. Many a time we cannot have something but we find it difficult to detach ourselves from it, especially in the process of finding the right spouse. Hence the words “and turn me away from it.”

One who has had their heart broken will find much benefit in reading this prayer. Do not beseech creation but rather cry to Allāh Almighty. He created your heart and He can mend it. He can bring light and joy into your life. Allāh will help you make up your mind, to see the other side and to feel an inclination one way or another, and to either decline or move forward.

Some people can receive some guidance through their dreams during *istikhāra*, but this is not necessary and it is not mentioned in ḥadīths that one must see a dream. This is a widely-held misconception about *istikhāra*, and people think their *istikhāra* is redundant if they do not see a dream related to it. Likewise, doing *istikhāra* for seven days is a scholarly recommendation based on experience. It can be done for any number of days. The essence of *istikhāra* is seeking assistance and blessing from Allāh, putting your trust in Him, letting the situation develop, and seeing how things pan out. Look for the

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signs from Allāh and see how you feel. Even a dream or feelings can be misinterpreted, one should think carefully and not make any hasty decisions. Make the decision on practical and rational grounds. Some people fall into superstition and make decisions based on far-fetched interpretations when the prayer may not even have been accepted.

Even after one has made their decision to move forward with a proposal, *istikhāra* can be continued until the marriage actually takes place. In this case, one is now asking Allāh for His blessing and favour (as per the literal meaning of *istikhāra*) in the marriage, not just for guidance in making the choice. My *shaykh*'s advice to me was to continue the *istikhāra* until the day of my marriage, even though it was a few months away and I was already fixed. Furthermore, a number of ḥadīths on *istikhāra* do not mention having to perform two *rak'as* along with the supplication, but just the supplication itself. So women can make the supplication alone at times when they are unable to pray. One may also repeat the supplication without prayer many times daily, each time he or she thinks of the proposal; and it is not necessary to do it at night only. Alternatively, one can also supplicate using the more concise supplication below:

اللَّهُمَّ خِرْ لِي وَاخْتَرْ لِي

Allāhumma khir li wa 'khtar li,

O Allāh, choose and select for me [the better one] (*Tirmidhī*, 3516).

This *du'ā*' is also very useful for on the spot decisions that one may need to make.

THE FAMILY MEETING

Going back to our proposal process, once a person has consulted (*mashwara*) and undertaken the *istikhāra*, a meeting of the two families can be arranged to discuss the "proposal." It is beneficial for the families to get to know each other, to ask pertinent questions and assess the compatibility of the young couple.

What happens at the family meeting will depend very much on one's cultural background. If you have not yet seen your prospective, this meeting is as good as any to do so. This is in fact advisable. Mughīra ibn Shu'ba relates, "I proposed to a woman, and the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ asked me, 'Have you looked at her?' I said no. So he said, 'Look at her, for it is most effective in inducing love and agreement to continue between you'" (*Nasā'i*, 3235; *Tirmidhī*, 1087).

Abū Hurayra ؓ also relates that a person came to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and said, "I am marrying a woman of the Anṣār." He ﷺ advised, "Look at her for the Anṣār have some issue with their eyes" (*Muslim*, 1424). According to Imām Nawawī, this was referring to their eyes being small or being blue. This also indicates that potential defects can be pointed out to prospective suitors and it would not be considered unlawful backbiting. It is therefore permissible to look at a prospective bride's face and hands, as by the face her beauty can be ascertained and by her hands her general colour, skin texture, etc.

Finally, Jābir ؓ relates that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "When any of you propose to a woman, and you have the ability to see that which attracted you to marry her, he should do so" (*Abū Dāwūd*, 2082).

As can be seen from these narrations, it is recommended for the prospective spouses to see one another and to establish that there is a level of attraction between them. For the purpose of marriage, it is permissible to look even if it is with desire, until they are satisfied that they are happy to move forward. Obviously continuing to look at each other without restraint beyond this point would not be appropriate.

Some cultures do not even allow the couple to look at each other before marriage. This does not have any Islamic basis. It is permissible according to all four Imāms, with just Imām Mālik stipulating that it must be with her permission (see *Mirqāt al-Mafātīḥ*, 5:2050). I heard from a friend of mine, whose father had been stationed in one of the rural areas in a particular Muslim country, that there was a strange tribe of bedouins in whose culture it is not allowed for the husband to look at his wife's face even *after* marriage. The women

wear *niqābs* in front of their husbands. Imagine being married to, living with and doing the things that couples do with their spouse, without ever being able to see their face. A curious incident made the news in 2010 when a man from one of these tribes decided he could no longer take the mystery and he removed his wife's *niqāb* when she was asleep to see what she looked like. Although she could sympathise, this was simply not done in their culture, and she reported him to the authorities.¹ That is obviously on the more extreme side of things and also demonstrates the power of culture, even if negative.

Some take things completely to the other extreme. They try to take a very literalist reading of the above ḥadīth to mean that you can look at the prospective spouse beyond the limits of *ḥijāb*, but this is not Islamically permissible. In my role as a *mufti*, I have even heard from a sister who had been asked by a prospective suitor for nude pictures. This is not at all permissible. If, for example, you want to know about her hair, you can ask a female relative to see her. In some cultures, the mother of the groom will even go to physically inspect the bride-to-be and inspect how fleshy or thin her calves are. But the limits of *ḥijāb* must be fully observed between a man and woman before marriage.

A ḥadīth related by Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه quoted earlier states that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "If a person whose religious standing and conduct you are satisfied with comes to you with a proposal, accept his proposal. If you do not trial will afflict the land and corruption will become widespread" (*Tirmidhī*, 1084).

This reminds us, as was mentioned in the last chapter, of the importance of seeking someone of sound religious commitment. Some people think that if the groom is poor, the girl will not be happy. This is simply not true. One of my teachers of Arabic in Damascus informed me of the difficulty he faced in getting married. He was about thirty years old at the time, well-educated with a PhD in Arabic, but had been rejected many times on the basis of not owning a home. He simply could not afford it with the modest

¹ See <http://www.alalam.ir/news/1693699> (accessed 28/10/2018).

income he received. He told me that a young lady of the family next door to him, who at the time was in her late teens, had instead been married off to a much older but wealthier man from one of the Gulf countries who was about sixty years old. The basis of this marriage was the parents' concern that she be "comfortable." But is wealth the only thing that matters? Did they not consider how "comfortable" she would be with the age gap? Is wealth the only factor in her happiness? I could sense his deep frustration as he asked me why he, an educated young man, would be dismissed in favour of, in his words, "someone so old that his hands would shake and his fingers would fumble with the lock as he opened the door to enter the house."

The dismissive attitudes of some families toward those who are poorer or from another ethnic background are undoubtedly contributing to the rising number of unmarried young men and women. This is a huge problem. When a proposal comes, it should be given due consideration as a whole, rather than rejected on the basis of one attribute. Their religious commitment and character should be the driving factor. If people are not able to get married, then as the above ḥadīth indicates, much trial will spread due to the abundance of unmarried young men and women, with their hormones raging, in the hyper-sexualised world we find ourselves in, leading to adultery, fornication and other sexual deviancies and vices.

DISCUSSION WITH THE PROSPECTIVE SPOUSE

Having taken a look at the prospective spouse, I feel it is very important for the couple to have some communication with one another. Especially in our time, when people have many different goals and ambitions, and women are more and more educated and relatively independent, and will have their own ideas regarding work, studies and plans for having children. There are also various cultural aspects and practicalities of life to take into consideration. So it is important to sit down and discuss these issues in a formal way. A brother I came across was finding difficulty in getting married as he wanted to fol-

wear *niqābs* in front of their husbands. Imagine being married to, living with and doing the things that couples do with their spouse, without ever being able to see their face. A curious incident made the news in 2010 when a man from one of these tribes decided he could no longer take the mystery and he removed his wife's *niqāb* when she was asleep to see what she looked like. Although she could sympathise, this was simply not done in their culture, and she reported him to the authorities.¹ That is obviously on the more extreme side of things and also demonstrates the power of culture, even if negative.

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low a stricter opinion that prohibited speaking with the prospective before marriage. I told him that times are very different now and it is very important to understand what the other person is like. In earlier generations, when one would generally be married within one's culture, there was not as much discrepancy in what one would expect. Women were expected to move in with the husband's family, have children, bring them up, possibly serve the in-laws and extended family, and perhaps assist in the family business, but not much else. Today, the reality is very different. Women have their own careers and education and may have strong ambitions to pursue particular paths. Hence, all of this needs to be discussed before the marriage so that both parties can come to understand the expectations and avoid any unwelcome surprises.

This discussion may take longer for some than for others. You will need to decide for yourself what issues you would like clarified. Questions can also be asked through third parties, over e-mail, text, on the phone or in person. One should always try to have a third party or chaperone present as it provides security, prevents things from becoming too informal, and thus helps to protect the couple from premature emotional entanglements. It is important to try to remain aloof during the process to help you make a more rational decision. Counsellors and *muftis* deal with many horror stories that come from premature emotional attachment. Doing one's best to avoid it as much as possible cannot be stressed enough.

It is a good idea to make a list of everything that is important and relevant for you. You can separate this list into the non-negotiables, and then a list of secondary bonus issues and questions. The most important issues to you (but be reasonable in deciding these) should be in the first list. If a person does not meet these criteria, you should not marry them on the expectation that they will change. At the same time, you should not be too picky. If you simply exclude people who do not meet all of your "bonus criteria," you will be waiting forever for Mr or Miss Perfect to show up. If someone meets your list of essentials you should give them serious consideration.

However, after the marriage, don't be too obsessed even with

the essentials, but keep an open mind. It may be that although you've done your homework your spouse does not possess an essential quality in a way that you had expected. But they may turn out better than expected in other qualities and that could be sufficient compensation. So do your homework with care and then leave the rest to Allāh Most High.

Examples of questions you may want to ask include:

1. What is your purpose in life?
2. Where do you see yourself in five, ten and twenty years?
3. How do you see the role of religion in your life?
4. What are you looking for in a spouse?
5. What are your expectations of marriage?
6. What is your understanding of an Islamic marriage?
7. Have you been married before?
8. Why have you chosen me as your potential spouse?
9. Do you suffer from any chronic disease or condition?
10. What did you study? How do you earn your living?
11. What are your plans for further study or your career?
12. Would you have any objection to my studying or working after marriage?
13. Do you want to work after marriage? After children?
14. How many children would you like to have, if any?
15. Would you like to have children straightaway?
16. How do you envisage bringing up your children?
17. Do you have any plans to relocate from your current home or work abroad?
18. Do you know of anything you want to do in life that may encroach on what I might want to do?
19. What kinds of things do you do for leisure?
20. What steps are you taking to improve yourself?
21. What is your relationship with your family?
22. Will any of your family members be living with us?
23. What do you expect your relationship to be like with the family of your spouse?

24. How do you feel about helping with your spouse's family?
25. What do you expect the relationship to be between me and your family?
26. What will your relationship with your friends be like?
27. Do you have friends from the opposite gender?
28. If you wrong someone, how do you apologise?
29. Do you find it difficult to apologise?
30. Are you an emotional and sensitive person?
31. Are you stubborn about your opinion or flexible?
32. What do you do when you are angry?
33. If there is a dispute in your marriage how should the conflict be resolved?
34. If there is a dispute how involved will your family be?
35. How do you see wealth?
36. What kind of financial expectations do you have of your spouse?
37. Do you like to have guests in your home for visits and meals?
38. What types of scholars do you listen to and like learning from?
39. Are you a night or day person?
40. What traits would you absolutely not want in your spouse?

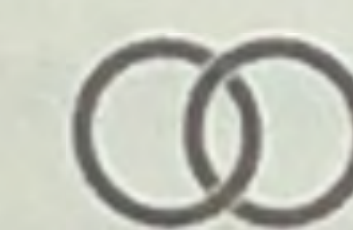
These are just a few examples. One should keep things formal and ask only about the most essential things. There will be a lot of time to find out about their favourite colour or *nashid* after the wedding!

When it comes to being asked an uncomfortable question, you should consider why they are asking it. Many people are genuinely concerned about whether their suitor may not be a virgin or may still be illicitly involved with someone. Despite this, it is a sin to reveal past sins just as it is impermissible to demand information about someone else's past sins. If you have had a "past," especially if it is something that may be known to the suitor, reassure them and allay their fears. You can say something like, "We all have a bit of a past that we are ashamed of. *Al-hamduli'LLāh*, Allāh has enabled me to reform myself." One should be as honest as possible.

As well as a formal meeting, some cultures have other ways to get to know a person for the sake of marriage. The extended family

members could, as in one report I received, take the suitor to perform *'umra* or some other place, as travel reveals a lot about the nature of a person. There are many ways, but at the end of the day, you will never know everything about a person before marrying them. In fact, you do not really want to. Part of the excitement and adventure of being newly married is the opportunity to get to know your spouse, discover new things about them, while working through any challenges through the blessed institution of marriage. One woman who had an arranged marriage put it beautifully: when you learn something new about your spouse it's like unwrapping a new present every day. This is something that is completely lost in the Western model of dating. The blessing simply is not there.

In one instance, a person I know who had done his due diligence in finding out what his prospective bride was like through her associates and teachers, and about her family in general, only then saw her for a few minutes and did not speak to her at all. His family had perceived that the bride's family may not be comfortable with the couple speaking together during the proposal process. However, he felt that it was important for him to hear her voice and see how she sounded. He therefore arranged for one of his female relatives to call her on the phone while he listened to her on the other line for just a few moments, and thus reassured himself. While this was all the interaction they had prior to the wedding, he was very happy to go ahead with the wedding. The next time he saw her was a few hours after the *nikāḥ* at her house when he went to pick her up, yet within only half an hour of being together in the car the ice was broken, and it was as though they had known each other for years. This is real *baraka*. They had both tried their best to do things by the book as much as possible, such as consulting and performing *istikhāra* as the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ had recommended, and were now basking in the divine blessings that descend from such reliance in Allāh. It is only Allāh that provides true love and success.

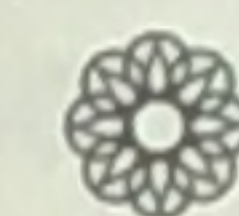




And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought (Rūm, 30:21).



Chapter 5



THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT AND WEDDING CEREMONIES

Once a couple has decided to go ahead with the marriage, the next issues to consider are the practicalities of getting married: the marriage contract and wedding ceremonies.

ENGAGEMENTS

Some form of engagement normally takes place after the agreement to marry, during which the couple may desire to get to know each other. It is important to note that, according to Islamic law, an engaged couple are still technically strangers and are unlawful for one another. Spending private time together at this stage is still not permissible. It is therefore strongly recommended to avoid prolonging the engagement. If that is necessary, it would be better to perform even a simple, low-key *nikāḥ* with just a few witnesses once both families have committed to going ahead with the marriage. That way, even if the couple cannot move in together straightaway, they can have private interactions.

Parents should be flexible in this regard and not stubbornly insist on long engagements without *nikāḥ*. Older generations come from a less overtly sexualised time (even if they appear less overtly practising), and they do not always understand the problem millennials face. Such



parents may expect a young couple to be patient and wait it out for two years or more. Even six months is too much; it is simply torture for the couple involved to have to face the licentiousness prevalent in today's society. Thinking about marriage and about one's future spouse can profoundly cloud one's thinking and ability to get on with normal life. If there are necessary delays in organising "official" ceremonies, a simple *nikāḥ* at least allows the couple to lawfully interact, talk on the phone or spend time together unattended. Long engagements, on the other hand, can spell disaster.

It is inevitable that engaged couples will get to know and become familiar with each other. When you meet someone for the first time, you are more formal and careful in what you say. Everyone has defects and nobody reveals the whole truth of themselves. If you are engaged and start talking more, becoming more loose and relaxed as time goes on, slowly the real character of the person will begin to show itself. The veil is lifted and you may decide you are no longer interested in them, and as you are not married you may decide to drop the whole thing. This is one of the problems with unlawful dating. Conversely, if you are married and notice a defect after the honeymoon period, you have already invested yourself and made a commitment to make things work. In this way, you will see the true nature of marriage being a relationship in which one has to make an effort, be patient and compromise to make things work. This avoids much heartbreak and hassle.

During the engagement period it is also very dangerous to be in informal contact through text messaging and other chatting applications. You don't know the other person well enough and messages can easily be misinterpreted. Say that you write a message and get the reply "OK." Among all the emotions of engagement you might interpret this "OK" as being cold, or even rude, while that is just the normal way the other person writes in a text message. Also, you may get the wrong idea if they have not messaged you one day, or if you can see marks to indicate your message has reached them but received no reply to your message.

By taking the above steps, and avoiding a long engagement and

premature informality, the couple will preserve the blessings and good prospects in their marriage and will avoid the evil that comes about from unlawful relationships and intimacy outside of marriage. After a *nikāḥ*, they can interact and get to know each other in a lawful manner even if they are not living together. Later, when they are ready to start living together (referred to as the *rukhsatī* in some cultures), a second more formal *nikāḥ* ceremony and reception can take place where the extended family and friends are invited.

However, you should only delay living together beyond the *nikāḥ* if there is a need, as there is optimal benefit in having them both happen at the same time (or as soon as possible). You would ideally want your honeymoon, or discovery period, to start right after the *nikāḥ*, so that it can last as long as possible with both of you living together. It might also feel a bit odd to be married to someone with only limited access to them. There is also greater risk of misunderstandings as compared to when there is no contact at all.

If a person you are considering is not interested in marriage right away, then it would be best to let them go. Emotional attachments cause us to feel that this person is the best, the one and only in the entire world, and that nobody else will ever come along. However, telling someone to wait around for you while circumstances get ready is torture. Some delay can be tolerated, such as giving a person a three-month window in which to make a decision. If there is a further delay, you should move along, as there really are many fish in the sea and you deserve better than to be led on and left hanging.

NIKĀḤ: THE SUNNA WAY

The actual marriage ceremony is quite simple. A day is chosen (preferably as soon as possible after the engagement) and announced. The Prophet ﷺ encouraged that marriages be announced so that the community learn of the union and not look at the couple with suspicion when seen together. Therefore, a marriage should not be contracted in secret. It is even the view of the Mālikīs that a pri-

vate *nikāh* that is not announced may not even be valid (see Dardir, *Al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr*, 2:216).

The following should be observed for the actual ceremony:

1. The best place for a *nikāh* is in the *masjid*. In a ḥadīth narrated by ʿĀʾisha رضي الله عنها, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “Announce this marriage, perform it in the *masjid*, and beat the *duffs* on it” (*Tirmidhī*, 1089). Holding the ceremony in the *masjid* helps in the announcement of it and provides for a blessed location, and since marriage is a form of worship, the *masjid* is the most suited place for it. The great Anatolian Ḥanafī jurist Ibn al-Ḥumām al-Sīwāsī (d. 861/1456) adds that it should be held on a Friday. He also clarifies that if the *duff* drum is used, it should be done outside the *masjid* (*Fatḥ al-Qadīr*, 3:189; *Mirqāt al-Mafātīḥ*, 5:2072).

2. Scholars and other righteous people could be invited to gain the blessing of their presence and their prayers.

3. The *nikāh* should be conducted by a righteous person or Muslim scholar.

4. At least two witnesses should be present at the gathering. Although all those present could potentially be witnesses, it is better to have two formal witnesses who sign the marriage contract and can be called upon in the event of any dispute later.

5. The marriage payment (dowry or *mahr*) should be stipulated beforehand and the person performing the ceremony should be informed of the amount so he can state it as part of the contract to the witnesses.

6. The bride should preferably appoint a representative (*wakīl*), such as her father, uncle, brother or any such elder, to represent her. The representative should be present in the gathering to provide consent of her *nikāh* to the groom she has chosen. According to the Ḥanafī school, the consent of an adult woman is necessary, and without it she cannot be married off by her father or guardian. Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه reports that Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ said, “A virgin is not to be married off until her permission is sought.” They asked, “How is her permission?” He replied, “Her silence” (*Bukhārī*, 5136; *Muslim*, 1419).

7. When the bride appoints her representative, there is a cus-

tom to have this witnessed by two of her relatives. The reason for this is to establish the representation so that the bride cannot deny it later. This is not an obligation but can be considered a recommended (*mustaḥabb*) practice; his representation would be valid even without it.

8. The sermon of need (*khuṭbat al-ḥāja*, as it is called) will be recited by the *imām* performing the *nikāh*. This brief sermon includes the three verses of *taqwā* (Āl ‘Imrān, 3:102; Nisā’, 4:1; Aḥzāb, 33:70–71) (see *Abū Dāwūd*, 2118; *Tirmidhī*, 1105; *Nasā’i*, 1404), and generally a ḥadīth or two about marriage, exhorting the couple and those present to fear Allāh in the marriage and beyond.

9. After the sermon, the *imām* will ask the representative: (a) if he gives consent to the bride’s marriage (taking her complete name), (b) to the groom (again taking his complete name), (c) for the stipulated amount of marriage payment (mentioning the amount), (d) in the presence of the two witnesses. If the representative consents, the *imām* turns to the groom and asks him if he accepts the bride in his marriage for the stipulated amount of marriage payment. The groom should reply in absolute terms, which can be achieved by using the past (or present) tense. “I accept her in my marriage” or “I have accepted her in my marriage” or “I do marry her” are all acceptable replies. It is preferable that he say this and not just “I do” or “I accept.” Sometimes, he may be asked to say the following three statements in Arabic: *qabiltuhā* (“I have accepted her”), *nakaḥtuhā* and *tazaḥwajtuhā* (both meaning, “I have married her”). The procedure does not have to be in the exact order above. It would be valid as long as all the elements are present.

10. The *imām* and others should then make the following prayer for the groom (and bride):

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَكَ وَبَارَكَ عَلَيْكَ وَجَمَعَ بَيْنَكُمَا فِي خَيْرٍ

Bārak Allāhu laka wa bāraka ‘alayka wa jamā’a baynakumā fi khayr,

May Allāh bless you and have His blessing descend upon you and unite you in goodness (*Abū Dāwūd*, 2130; *Tirmidhī*, 1091).

Thereafter, he will usually make some more supplications for the couple and all those present.

Some *masjids* and *imāms* have the legal capacity to solemnise a civil marriage at the same time or separately, which is then recognised by the local civil authority. This is beneficial as it may not entail re-performing the marriage again in a separate civil ceremony.

THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT

An important part of the marriage is the formal marriage contract. I have noticed that people tend not to give it very much consideration. But it could be an extremely useful safeguard in the event that the couple face any problems in the future.

The marriage contract outlines the essential agreement taking place between a man and woman when they agree to enter into marriage. It can consist of a written proof of marriage, generally signed by the bride, groom, representative, witnesses and the *imām* officiating the marriage. It can contain a written commitment to an Islamic marriage and may include any terms and conditions to the marriage, including the amount of *mahr*.

For women especially, the marriage contract could provide an element of security. In Islam, a man holds the right to give a divorce, whereas a woman who wants to exit a marriage must seek a dissolution of it through *khul'* (see chapter 10). Sometimes a husband is abusive, inattentive, or has abandoned his wife but refuses to release her from the marriage to get on with her life in the way she wants. He seeks to punish her by neither fulfilling the role as a husband nor divorcing her. Such women have to generally seek a *khul'* through an Islamic judiciary panel. However, this is generally a time consuming and lengthy process. Therefore, if this is feared from a prospective husband, the contract for marriage can stipulate a right of divorce conferred on a trusted third party or on the wife herself. This means that, under the stipulated circumstances, the third party has the right to issue the divorce conferred upon him

or her. It should be remembered that the husband must agree to this and does not lose the right to the divorce himself by giving the right to another person. He may still exercise the right himself as can the other person. This conferred right can also be created after the marriage, through mutual agreement of the spouses, and does not have to be done during the initial contract.

A particular couple had been having problems in their marriage and the husband was abusive and violent. He finally ended up divorcing her and she was relieved to leave. They then decided to get back together. A scholar advised her to stipulate that he confer a right of divorce to her or a third party, so it could be invoked to release her from the marriage immediately, in the event of him being abusive and refusing to divorce her again.

A normal marriage does not need such stipulations and neither is a divorce vested to the wife by default. Hence, it is not according to the spirit of Islam. The spirit of Islamic law holds that only the husband holds the right to divorce, but it sometimes becomes necessary as a safeguard to confer the option upon the wife, so any such allowance is in reality an extension of the husband's right and helps to save him from tormenting his wife and falling into sin.

In a marriage contract, one is allowed to make any stipulations one wishes as long as the other agrees upon it. However, it will only be enforceable if it is according to the spirit of Islamic law and the rights of the marriage. A wife may stipulate that the husband is not allowed to take another wife. However, this is not enforceable and does not render any such second marriage by him invalid by default. In such a case, it would be akin to breaking a promise and thus blameworthy in that sense. However, the wife may request a divorce in this case. Most men do not marry again and although polygamy seems to be a hot topic when men get together, not many actually do it. This will be discussed further in chapter 9.

THE MAHR (DOWRY)

The *mahr*, also known in Arabic as *ṣadāq* or *ṣidāq*, from the root ṣ-d-q denoting sincerity, is a nuptial gift of honour presented by the groom to the bride upon their marriage. Allāh says,

﴿وَأَوْفُوا النِّسَاءَ صَدُقَاتِهِنَّ نِحْلَةً فَإِنْ طِبْنَ لَكُمْ عَنْ شَيْءٍ مِنْهُ نَفْسًا فَكُلُوهُ هَنِيئًا مَرِيئًا﴾

Give women their bridal gift upon marriage, though if they are happy to give up some of it for you, you may enjoy it with a clear conscience (Nisā', 4:4).

It is an Islamic right of the wife to receive this, and technically she can stipulate whatever amount she chooses, whether that be a sum of money or an item of value. The general default sum (referred to as *mahr al-mithl*) is the amount received by other women of similar character and social standing on the paternal side of her family. When she receives her *mahr*, she can do as she pleases with it as it is hers. Her family have no right to receive or control her *mahr*. If she wants to use part of it on the husband that is her prerogative as mentioned in the above verse. The husband should give it to her on the wedding day or even before, although it becomes obligatory as soon as the *nikāḥ* is solemnised. It can also be spilt up into an instalment to be paid immediately (*mu'ajjal*) and a sum to be paid at a fixed later date (*mu'ajjal*), or even as security in the event of divorce or his death, at which stage it becomes due in full. If the advanced portion is not paid, she has the right to withhold herself from having any intimacy with him until he has given it to her.

The *mahr* amount varies hugely between cultures. It is disliked to demand a very high *mahr* (in normal circumstances) and it can be as low as ten dirhams, approximately 30.618 grams of silver (Ḥanafī school) in value, though not less. In some cultures, there is a particular norm for what women of the family usually receive (the *mahr al-mithl*, as mentioned earlier). They would view any *mahr* of less than this norm as an embarrassment to the family. In other cultures, a family meeting to discuss the dowry may start with an extremely inflated figure followed by an artificial play discussion that

can go on for hours to negotiate it down. There is no Islamic basis for this practice. A woman does of course have the right to ask for any *mahr* amount she wishes, including a high amount of say ten or twenty thousand pounds. However, having the right does not mean it is encouraged to ask for high amounts. Lady 'Ā'isha ؓ reports several ḥadīths from the Prophet ﷺ about this. He said, "The most blessed marriage is the one that is the least burdensome" (Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, 6146). He ﷺ said, "The most blessed woman is the least burdensome" (*Musnad Aḥmad*, 25119). He ﷺ also said, "It is from the auspiciousness of a woman that proposing to her is easy, her *mahr* is light and her womb is fertile" (*Musnad Aḥmad*, 24478). Lady 'Ā'isha's nephew 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr ؓ, after transmitting this from her, commented, "I add from myself that from her first act of inauspiciousness is to make her dowry exorbitant" (Ḥakīm, *Al-Mustadrak*, 2739).

Such high demands can be a big barrier to people getting married. In this day and age, especially with the temptations our youth face, we should do everything possible to facilitate marriage and make it easy. Families should thus avoid acceding to cultural pressures to maintain such high *mahr* payments. The Leader of the Faithful 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ said, "Avoid demanding exorbitant *mahr* from one another, for had it been an act of piety according to Allāh or honour among people, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ would have been the most worthy of doing it. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ did not marry any of his wives, nor marry off any of his daughters, for more than twelve measures" (*ūqiyya*), that is, of 480 dirhams (silver) (*Tirmidhī*, 1114; *Ibn Māja*, 1887).

The Mahr of Fāṭima ؓ or the Mahr of the Prophet's Wives ؓ?

If the bride does make a high demand, it is then up to the groom to negotiate with her and then take it or leave it. As a recommendation, we find the example of the *mahr Fāṭimī*, the amount of *mahr* given to Lady Fāṭima ؓ upon her marriage to 'Alī ؓ. This appears to have become more popular over the last two decades. However, the narrations about its amount are anything but consistent. 'Alī ؓ

is reported to have sold off some of his assets to raise his *mahr* (Abū Dāwūd, 2125; Nasā'ī, 3375). The majority of narrations show that he gave 480 dirhams (1,469.66 grams silver), which appears to be the strongest view and equals about £725 at the time of writing. Other opinions are 400 silver *mithqāls* (1,749.9 grams), 400 dirhams (1,224.7 grams) and 500 dirhams (1,530.9 grams), but they are not as strongly substantiated. The correct amount should be recalculated at the time of marriage according to the prevailing silver price of the time.

Due to the dispute in the valuation of this *mahr* amount, and it being the amount 'Alī could come up with after selling off some of his assets, and no reports showing it being used again, the stronger recommendation would be to stipulate the *mahr* paid by the Prophet himself to his wives, the mothers of the believers. The ḥadīth in this regard is rigorously authenticated and undisputed. Abū Salama ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān reports, "I asked 'Ā'isha the wife of Allāh's Messenger, 'What was the *mahr* of Allāh's Messenger?' She replied, 'His *mahr* to his wives was twelve *ūqiyya* measures and one *nashsh*.' She then asked, 'Do you know what is a *nashsh*?' I said no, so she said, 'It is half an *ūqiyya* measure. This amounts to 500 dirhams, and that was the *mahr* given by Allāh's Messenger to his wives'" (Muslim, 1426). This was paid multiple times by the Prophet and is by agreement 500 dirhams (1,530.9 grams silver), which equals about £755 at the time of writing. This is only twenty dirhams over the strongest *mahr* Fātimī amount of 480. Also, the ḥadīth mentioned earlier from 'Umar is superseded by this narration as it is from Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim. It is also likely that 'Umar mentioned complete measures and omitted the *nashsh*.

Having said this, it would be acceptable in some circumstances to stipulate a higher *mahr* for the security of the wife, especially if there is fear of abandonment and neglect from the husband.

Aside from money, the bride could request the *mahr* being a gift in kind, such as jewellery, payment for ḥajj or the like. As for the issue of wedding rings, this is not a prophetic *sunna* nor is it found in the Islamic tradition. As jewellery is customarily worn by women, if you wish to buy a ring to give to your wife-to-be, it is permissible, but it

is important that it be a gold or silver ring. Rings made of anything else are not permitted to be worn even by women. It is mentioned in a ḥadīth that a man came to the Prophet wearing an iron ring. To this he expressed his disapproval and said, "What is it that I find on you the adornment of the people of hellfire?" (Tirmidhī, 1785; Abū Dāwūd, 4223).

However, some scholars (such as the Shāfi'is) allow her to wear an iron ring based on another ḥadīth, related by Sahl ibn Sa'd, in which a man came to the Prophet looking to get married. He was not able to provide anything as *mahr* and so he was told, "Go and find something, even an iron ring" (Bukhārī, 5151; Muslim, 1425).

Other than this opinion, no other bands should be worn by women, though other kinds of jewellery can be made of whatever materials a woman likes. The wife can also give a gift to the husband at the time of marriage if she so chooses. A ḥadīth states, "Give gifts to one another, you will increase in love" (Bukhārī, *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 594; Tabarānī, *Al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ*, 7240).

THE JAHĒZ

It is important to differentiate at this point between the *mahr* and the household items, equipment, furniture and utensils needed to furnish their living space, which in some cultures is expected to be provided by the bride's family and is called *jahāz* or *jihāz* in Arabic and *jahēz* in Urdu. This is in fact part of the husband's responsibility to provide his wife with clothing, food, and shelter. Allāh says,

﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ﴾

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allāh has preferred the one above the other and because they spend their wealth on them (Nisā', 4:34).

All such furnishing will technically remain the property of the husband if he has provided it. If the wife or her family voluntarily assist in this regard, this is acceptable. For instance, 'Alī relates that the

Prophet ﷺ provided a few items to Fāṭima ʿa on her marriage such as a white woollen garment (*kbamīla*), a water skin and a fibre-filled pillow (*Nasāʾi*, 3384; *Musnad Aḥmad*, 643). It must be remembered that if the bride's family contribute anything, they should make clear whether it is a gift or merely for the couple to borrow.

However, since the general expenses and upkeep of the family is the responsibility of the husband, the wife or her family cannot be obligated to provide a *jahēz* (dowry). Many cultures place this obligation on the bride's family, an especially heavy burden for fathers who have many daughters. Some have to sell all their assets or take on debilitating loans to marry their daughters off. The above incident of Lady Fāṭima ʿa receiving some supplies from her father is no proof for obligating such a payment. The Prophet Muḥammad ʿ was also the guardian of ʿAlī ʿa, who was marrying his daughter Fāṭima. ʿAlī ʿa was destitute at the time and did not possess much and the Prophet ʿ made this arrangement so the couple could have some living essentials. There is no proof that the Prophet ʿ did this for any of his other daughters or recommended this to any other Companion ʿ. In fact, there is no evidence for any tradition of *jahēz* during the Prophet's time ʿ (see Nu'mānī, *Ma'ārif al-Ḥadīth*, 7:30) nor any such recommendation in the *fiqh* manuals.

THE WALĪMA AND WEDDING PARTIES

The *walīma* is food that is served to one's family, friends and neighbours following a marriage. It is an emphasised *sunna* (*mu'akkada*) and a divinely rewarded act that, once the couple have consummated their marriage, the husband provide a *walīma* reception, either on the same day, the day after, or at least within a few days of consummation, as an expression of gratitude. One should make an honest effort to attend whenever invited, unless for a valid excuse such as the reception containing unlawful practices. A ḥadīth suggests that intentionally avoiding an invitation to a *walīma* is blameworthy (*Muslim*, 1432). The *walīma* is not the duty of the bride or her fam-

ily but that of the husband. The Messenger of Allāh ʿ provided a *walīma* and fed people after many of his marriages. Anas ibn Mālik ʿ reports that the Prophet ʿ provided a *walīma* on the consummation of his marriage with Zaynab bint Jaḥsh ʿ and served meat and bread to the fill of his guests (*Bukhārī*, 4794; *Muslim*, 1428). He also reports that the Prophet ʿ served a goat (*Muslim*, 1428). Yet Ṣafīyya bint Shayba ʿ relates that the Prophet ʿ provided a *walīma* of just two measures (*mudd*) of barley during one of his marriages (*Bukhārī*, 5172). Anas ʿ also reports that, on the occasion of his marriage to Ṣafīyya bint Ḥuyayy ʿ, he ʿ did what may now be called a “pot-luck” or “one dish” invitation, where each guest brings what they have available, and they sat down together and ate it (*Bukhārī*, 371; *Muslim*, 1365). Such a simple catering arrangement for a wedding would be seen as very strange in our times.

We see in our communities now that weddings have become a spectacle of much extravagance, with people saving for years and even taking out large loans, spending tens of thousands on lavish weddings with extra ceremonies, glamour and pomp. This sort of attitude toward weddings is not reserved only for the rich. We find more and more people with modest means feeling pressured to spend beyond their resources to put on the biggest show possible. Yet we know from the teachings of our religion that simplicity is best. “The most blessed marriage is the one that is the least burdensome” (Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, 6146)

The best of weddings is the least extravagant, meaning that it is the easiest wedding psychologically, financially, and in every other sense. Extravagance can be defined as going beyond your means. This will vary depending on the financial situation and culture of each couple and their families. Is it extravagant to pay for a bus or coach to take people to the wedding in another city? Not necessarily. You may have a wide extended family and have the financial means to accommodate them. If your provision of a coach to help them with travel is out of happiness to share the wedding occasion with them and you are not doing it for show, this may be something praiseworthy.

The wedding dress is another major expense. Brides feel obligated

to spend a small fortune on a dress they will probably wear only once in a lifetime. After the wedding it is hung in a cupboard or stored in a suitcase for its sentimental value but never to be worn again. Many times it does not even fit properly after a few months. Invest modestly in your wedding clothes. It would be better to get something that you can wear again or, alternatively, give or sell it to someone else, who may not have the same means, to wear at your wedding. Then there are things like organising several different events related to the wedding, such as elaborate *mehndi* parties, where certain things (including some unlawful practices) *must* happen, such that it becomes like a wedding in itself. This is when things become problematic. When we start adding too much excess to marriage ceremonies, not to mention music, dance, and other unlawful customs, we lose the blessing of the union. For example, a common occurrence is to have an official part of the wedding where the groom comes on stage in the women's side of the event, even if it started off being segregated. Many women present are forced to undergo the inconvenience of having to cover themselves up. Why not have something just with the closest family members after everybody else leaves? Another common problem in some religious weddings that are segregated is that there are nearly always a few men who will disrespectfully go in and out of the women's side. The point of segregating the wedding seems to have been completely missed, and those who observe *hijab* consistently will be unable to relax for the whole event. Such men should be prevented.

It is especially important at the time of marriage to distinguish between what is culture and what is religion, and within culture what is allowed and what is not allowed. For example, the husband is the one required to provide the *walima*. The bride's family is also allowed to feed people on the occasion of her marriage if they so desire. However, this is not a *sunna* but rather a custom. Nowadays, it is frowned upon if the bride's family do not do it. At times, both the bride and groom's family may share in the expenses of the *walima*, and have a single, and maybe larger, function. This is also an acceptable arrangement as long as it is not done out of obligation.

There is an example of a family I know who had a tradition of inviting the extended family over to eat at their house or at another location for several days prior to the wedding. Despite being difficult for both the guests and the hosts, it took place and each gathering would go on for hours each evening. The mother of the groom, who had invited everyone to attend in the first place, eventually became angry and frustrated toward the latter days and even shouted at some of the guests to get out. This shows just how bewildering some cultural expectations can be. What may have begun as a manageable custom in a small village in India, Pakistan or Africa was just not convenient elsewhere. People feel compelled to do things even when it is unnecessary and burdensome. What's more, in this particular example, another related family felt that when it was their son's marriage they had to also invite guests for several days as otherwise it would look bad on them.

If you are faced with these sorts of situations with your family, you should try to stand your ground and be principled in what is right and what is not, but do not be too uptight. If serving good food and treating people is within your means, it is okay to do so. If you want to be adventurous and hospitable on the occasion of a wedding, do it for the sake of giving joy and happiness to people, not for the sake of showing off. Do it for the sake of Allāh and look toward people's needs. Not all culture is negative, and sometimes pushing for an extremely simple wedding, when it is upsetting to parents and relatives, is not a wise way to start off your married life. The wedding should be a joyous occasion for all the family and guests, not just the bride and groom. You should strive for an attitude of balance.

Wedding parties can be a means of fulfilling a number of *sunnas* while also being an occasion for family and friends to celebrate the new union and new chapter in the newlywed couple's lives. It is crucial that we focus on ensuring that we are following the Islamic guidelines at this important time, and that we start the marriage off on the right foot by seeking to please Allāh Most High. And to Him is all praise.

TAKING THE HUSBAND'S SURNAME

Another question that sometimes arises at the time of marriage is whether or not the wife should adopt the husband's surname. Islamically it is prohibited for someone to claim they are the child of someone who is not their biological father. In one of many ḥadīths regarding this subject, Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqās ؓ reports that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Whosoever claims to be the son of other than his father, knowing him to not be his father, he will be denied Paradise" (*Bukhārī*, 6766; *Muslim*, 115).

However, if a woman taking the name of the husband when getting married is considered a normal custom in a society, and people do not mistake her to be from her husband's family, this does not fall under the warning of this ḥadīth. If it is not the custom and changing the name is for the purpose of giving a certain impression to others, this is problematic. In English culture, as well as in Gujarati culture, to take the husband's surname is simply a cultural custom for considerations of uniformity of family, ease of form filling, etc. Hence, it cannot be deemed unlawful. However, if a woman wishes to keep her maiden name, that is completely fine, and she should not be forced or pressured by extended family or others to take her husband's name. It is not the Islamic practice to change it, as her name generally represents the family she came from. Keeping her original family name provides the benefit of her immediately being recognised as a member of her clan. The verse we cited earlier says,

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا
إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allāh is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allāh is Knowing and Acquainted (*Hujurāt*, 49:13).

From this we see that to recognise, know and respect family lineages

and cultures is beneficial. We should know where we are from and be proud of our family lineage. Attributing yourself to your parents and to your family is a way of respecting them.

Women during the time of the Prophet ﷺ were known by their family names or attributed to their fathers. Tribal affiliations were very important. It was also normal for women to marry multiple times, as they could be widowed or divorced, and polygamy was also common, so it was most convenient for them to be known by their families. Hence, you have the wives of the Prophet ﷺ Zaynab bint Jaḥash al-Asadiyya, Khadīja bint Khuwaylid al-Asadiyya and Umm Salama Hind al-Makhzūmiyya (*Asqalānī*, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 1:252.), then her daughter Umm Kulthūm al-Makhzūmiyya (*Ṭabarānī*, *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, 25:81), along with the mother of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ Ḥantama bint Hishām al-Makhzūmiyya (*Dhahabī*, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, 2:397), and the Jawniyya woman the Prophet ﷺ married then divorced (*Ḥākim*, *Al-Mustadrak*, 4:39)—all known by their family names. In this climate, keeping one's family name made more sense than having to change it many times in one's life. There have been some exceptions to this. For example, the Prophet's ﷺ companion Miqdād ibn 'Amr ؓ had been adopted by Aswad ibn 'Abd Yaghūth and became well known as Miqdād ibn al-Aswad. When the verse of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (33:5) was revealed ordering people to be attributed to their biological fathers, Miqdād started declaring that he was the son of 'Amr (see *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, 3:235; Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 3:119). However, some people continued to refer to him as Ibn al-Aswad (son of Aswad) too, and as such he can be found with both names in the ḥadīth collections. Since he had clearly announced his name change there was no longer any confusion, and therefore no harm in being called by his adoptive name.





[...] and do good so that you may succeed
(Hajj, 22:77).



Chapter 6



BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP

Human beings are social creatures. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ was known to spend much time in retreat, away from the people, during the years immediately preceding his prophethood. However, we see that after he received revelation, he remained present and active in his community. He had numerous roles: spiritual leader, husband and father, military commander and many others. In bringing the message of Islam to the people, he spent a lot of his time dealing with people. Thus, our religion is one that requires us not to become hermits worshipping Allāh in a cave somewhere. Rather it requires us to engage with other human beings and to live our religious values through our interactions with others in our daily activities.

We influence others and we are influenced by them. We have various relationships: with our parents, children, extended family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and those we do not know. The way we deal with one person will differ to how we deal with another, as there are natural differences between these relationships and the various situations in which we find ourselves. Despite these differences, in all types of human interaction we find certain universal principles. These concern the content of a person's character. Good character will come to benefit a person in all of their relationships. If a person is prone to a particular weakness in their character, this will come into play in their interactions as well. Working on the

core of one's personal, moral and spiritual development provides a broad spectrum of benefits and can define the success of a person and their relationships.

The relationship between husband and wife is particularly important, probably even more in some ways than the relationship between a parent and child. The marital relationship is constant and intense and has a profound impact on a person in their day-to-day life. Success or failure in married life can thus make or break one's other relationships. It is therefore essential to thoroughly invest in this relationship. I struggle to understand how there are so many nasty husband-wife jokes going around: surely the relationship between spouses should be a beautiful, friendly and healthy relationship. It should be the best relationship.

Married life is a journey of many decades and, as it is said, no journey is too long with a good companion. Together with your spouse, your life's journey will be made up of many achievements, milestones, successes and some failures. Although many decades may sound like a long time, the truth is that our time in this world is short. We should urgently strive to live that journey with purpose and with excellence in behaviour and character.

LOVE, PIETY AND BLESSING AS THE FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE

Building a successful marital relationship requires an understanding of the foundations of marriage. This does not simply mean memorising a list of rulings about the rights and duties of husbands and wives. These rulings are there as fences, as lines that are drawn to ensure certain parameters are kept for the health of the marriage, and are referenced in times of difficulty. They are not the foundation. It is similar to the prayer, which has a certain number of obligatory elements. Nobody in their right mind would pray by only completing these and skipping all the *sunna* elements of the prayer, and whizzing only through the mandatory steps to ensure the obligation was

done. The key to successful prayer is in one's focus and one's state of presence with the divine and remembrance and love for Him Most High. The same goes for marriage.

What, then, is the true essence of marriage? The marriage sermon (*khutba*) that is recited by the *imām* officiating a *nikāḥ* includes certain verses of the Qur'an:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا﴾

O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate, and from the two has spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be mindful of Allāh, in whose name you make requests of one another. Beware [of severing the ties] of kinship: Allāh is always watching over you. (Nisā', 4:1),

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

O you who believe! Fear Allāh as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam (Āl 'Imrān, 3:102),

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا﴾

O you who believe! Fear Allāh and speak words of appropriate justice (Aḥzāb, 33:70).

We see that the common theme in these three verses is *taqwā*, fear of Allāh or God-consciousness. This is the true foundation of a successful marriage. When both spouses develop a sense of reverent awe for Allāh Most High, when they are God-conscious and focus on living a life for the sake of Allāh, they will always strive to do the right thing. Whatever issues they may face together, they both know they are ultimately accountable to a higher power.

When spouses strive for *taqwā*, the purpose of marriage in providing contentment for both of the spouses can be achieved. For this to happen, both will have to be accommodating and to make sacrifices.

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﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا﴾

O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate, and from the two has spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be mindful of Allāh, in whose name you make requests of one another. Beware [of severing the ties] of kinship: Allāh is always watching over you. (Nisā', 4:1),

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

O you who believe! Fear Allāh as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam (Āl 'Imrān, 3:102),

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا﴾

O you who believe! Fear Allāh and speak words of appropriate justice (Aḥzāb, 33:70).

We see that the common theme in these three verses is *taqwā*, fear of Allāh or God-consciousness. This is the true foundation of a successful marriage. When both spouses develop a sense of reverent awe for Allāh Most High, when they are God-conscious and focus on living a life for the sake of Allāh, they will always strive to do the right thing. Whatever issues they may face together, they both know they are ultimately accountable to a higher power.

When spouses strive for *taqwā*, the purpose of marriage in providing contentment for both of the spouses can be achieved. For this to happen, both will have to be accommodating and to make sacrifices.

Things that they had previously been free to do while single will need to be reconsidered. Whether that be late night chilling with the brothers or sisters, time spent on the phone and social media, surfing the net or playing video games, overtime at work, counseling and teaching—all of these will need to take a back seat while you make your spouse your priority. This is especially important in the early days of marriage, when the husband and wife need to learn how to bond, to learn who the other person is, to learn about each other's strengths and assist each other in their relationship. This is the person you need to make it with.

This inclination tends to come quite naturally during the honeymoon period, during which a couple want to spend a lot of time together, getting to know one another and doing things for each other. However, after this initial phase wears away, with the first argument or the first big problem or difficulty encountered, when the first cracks and flaws begin to show, it can seem like everything has gone wrong. The perfect image you had of your spouse and the ideal married life you were hoping for has come crashing down. Preparing yourself before marriage is helpful in removing these kinds of false expectations. There simply is no perfection in this world. If Allāh wanted to create a "perfect" marriage for anyone on this earth, he would have done so for his beloved Prophet ﷺ, but yet we know that even he faced certain challenges in his marriages. Part of the reward of marriage is learning how to negotiate problems as they arise. One has to learn to tolerate, to deal with the most serious problems and to overlook the smaller ones. If you are a perfectionist, you will be in big trouble. This is where forbearance, good *akhlāq* and *taqwā* come into play.

When we follow the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ and strive to live with the best possible character, we can create a relationship based upon affection, love and understanding. Just as the *ṣalāt* of the person who loves Allāh is different, in the same way, when spouses truly love each other they will go the extra mile and have the resolve to make things work no matter what happens. This is true love. True love is not based upon infatuation or physical desire or big romantic

gestures. True love does not get old, but rather intensifies as the years go on. When material goods become old-fashioned or out of date, we are able to replace them. Your spouse grows with you, evolves as you evolve, matures as you mature. Love matures as long as both parties are playing their roles properly.

Pablo Neruda says (in *La Reina* "The Queen"),

I have named you queen.
There are taller than you, taller.
There are purer than you, purer.
There are lovelier than you, lovelier.
But you are the queen.

When you go through the streets
No one recognizes you.
No one sees your crystal crown, no one looks
At the carpet of red gold
That you tread as you pass,
The nonexistent carpet.

And when you appear
All the rivers sound
In my body, bells
Shake the sky,
And a hymn fills the world.

Only you and I,
Only you and I, my love,
Listen to me.

Striving for *taqwā* and living out one's married life for the sake of Allāh is when *baraka*, blessings, will descend upon the marriage. By following Islamic guidance, both sides can fulfil their roles as husband and wife. In the *du'ā'* we make for newlyweds, we ask Allāh Most High to bestow *baraka* upon the bride and groom. *Baraka* is the secret ingredient, a divine spiritual force, a flow of blessing and grace, that allows a couple to bond together, even if they may be from very different backgrounds.

THE MARRIAGE DYNAMIC

As we have suggested above, much of the strength of a marriage lies in each spouse fulfilling his or her respective role. It is part of Allāh's divine wisdom that He created men and women as equal spiritual beings, but as inherently different creations with different responsibilities. It is mentioned in a ḥadīth:

Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. The leader of people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects. A man is the guardian of his family and he is responsible for them. A woman is the guardian of her husband's home and his children and she is responsible for them. So every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock (*Bukhārī*, 5200; *Muslim*, 1829).

Thus, in the structure of the Muslim family, the man is the head of the household. This means that he is a leader, steering the course of his family in the journey of life. However, being the head of the household does not mean that he is like a boss or tyrant who subjugates his wife. In this day and age leadership is vied for and people assume that to be in a position of authority and power is something to be sought after. This was not the attitude of our pious predecessors. In fact, from an Islamic perspective the opposite is true. It is related that "the leader of a people is their servant" (*Munāwī*, *Fayḍ al-Qadīr*, 7066).

A leader is the servant to those over whom he is entrusted. To be in a position of authority or leadership is a burden and responsibility; it is not an ego trip for the power hungry. When it comes to marriage and the dynamic between husbands and wives, our communities are rife with unhealthy cultural ideas of what manhood means. To be "the man of the house" does not mean that all you do for your family is to earn money, and then when you come home you sit and expect to be waited on. This is not the Islamic model. As the best of husbands, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ gives us a model of excellent conduct in this regard. Many narrations from Lady 'Ā'isha رضي الله عنها describe how he ﷺ occupied himself at home. She said, "He was at the service of his

household; when the time for prayer came, he would leave to pray" (*Bukhārī*, 676).

A man is a breadwinner and he is a leader. But a real man is more than this. He must be a caretaker and respectful to his wife and children's needs. The husband's role of leadership is often misconstrued to mean that a wife must be submissive and obedient in fulfilling his every whim. This does a great injustice to what the spirit of the marital relationship is meant to be. The statement that women must be obedient to their husbands is technically true, but we must remember that the technical rights and responsibilities of the spouses are the bare bones of a marriage. When both partners respect each other, issues can be resolved by communication and mutual compromise, but if things break down, these are the very fundamental responsibilities that a judge or arbiter will apply to try to keep things together. In the rule of law, a wife needs to be available for intimacy and to not allow anyone into the home that the husband does not approve of (basically, protect his assets in his absence). These are among the bare bones of her responsibility. Her "obedience" is more an aspect of respect that has to go both ways. To go on about one's rights over the other spouse or to force either to do anything is futile. Force will never create a successful marriage. As the Prophet ﷺ has stated, "The best of you are those who are best to their wives" (*Tirmidhī*, 3895).

As for the wife, she is the queen of the household, and has a responsibility over her children. Just as a true man does more for his family than simply earn money, a true woman also does more for her family and her marriage than simply being available for intimacy with her husband. A woman is truly at the heart of the Muslim family. Her attitude and demeanour permeate the entire household and she holds the hearts of all those around her in her hand. She is a source of comfort and solace to those around her. There are numerous stories that could be recounted where a woman is the one helping her husband and encouraging him in thinking in the right way and exerting a positive influence on him. When a husband comes home with various stresses and problems he has been facing outside, she

can be the one to help him relax, calm him down and make him see some sense.

The Prophet ﷺ, in the sixth year of *hijra*, set out for pilgrimage from the blessed city of Madinah to Makkah, but the Muslims were prevented from entering the city. This was followed by the Truce of Hudaibiyya, which outlined that they would not be able to make pilgrimage now but would come back the following year. The Prophet ﷺ ordered his companions to exit their *iḥrām* by sacrificing the animals they had brought with them and by shaving their heads, but they seemed reluctant to fulfil the command. They had so wanted to perform the pilgrimage and were very disheartened. He went back into his tent, and inside was his wife Umm Salama رضي الله عنها, who was accompanying him on the trip. With her calm approach and with deep wisdom and insight, she advised him that he should simply go out and exit his *iḥrām* in front of them, without saying anything to them. When the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ did so, his companions followed suit (see *Musnad Ahmad*, 18910).

This is just one of many examples we find in the *sīra* and in the lives of our pious predecessors of the deep emotional support that spouses give to one another. The relationship between husband and wife is one of encouragement and assistance. This is not just of the wife supporting the husband but a mutual encouragement that goes both ways. They are partners and friends in their joint journey through life, each supporting the other by fulfilling their complementary roles in marriage. By working together for the sake of Allāh, they will *insha Allāh* be a couple in Paradise and together in bliss for all eternity.

GENERAL ADVICE FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

Building a successful marriage requires many key elements. There are general principles in terms of working on one's character that impact positively on all of one's relationships, and in respecting and understanding the key purposes of marriage, and the roles of the

spouses. Then we can move on to talk in a more specific way about how we can practically develop a healthy marital relationship, both from religious and general psychological perspectives.

These points can be roughly divided into four broad categories:

- Character and religious commitment
- Companionship
- Social skills and communication
- Mercy and compassion.

CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

Many of us have big shortcomings in our character. Flaws such as anger, jealousy, miserliness, and obsessive paranoia about our spouses can be fatal to a marriage. We must strive to rid ourselves of such spiritual diseases and instil in ourselves the attributes of patience, gratitude, and mindfulness of Allāh, such that we think of the best way to seek His good pleasure in every situation. Practically, one should take time out to read books and listen to lectures on sublime character. There are many such texts available, such as *Islamic Conduct* by Shaykh 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, *Ādāb al-Mu'āsharāt* by Ḥakīm al-Umma Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānawī, *The Path to Perfection* by Mawlānā Masīḥullah Khān, *Ādāb al-Ṣuḥba* (Etiquette of Camaraderie/Companionship) by Imām Sha'rānī, and the well-known books of Imām Ghazalī. Imām Shāfi'ī (d. 204/819) also advised people to travel, as by it you can learn good character. One finds that some communities have a particular negative character trait and all within that community have become blind to it. When you go elsewhere, you acquire a fresh perspective and are able to reflect more critically upon your own shortcomings.

This personal development is important on an individual level but could also be a joint activity. As a couple, you can read a book, listen to lectures or attend classes and courses together. You can also engage in mutual worship, turning prayers and *dhikr* together into a regular family activity. Spouses waking each other to pray *tabajjud*

together is much better and more effective than each of them trying alone. By engaging in spiritual development together, you will be working together to strive religiously and to be in Paradise together, thus keeping your focus fixed firmly on the purpose of our life and on the hereafter.

COMPANIONSHIP

The next area to consider in building a successful marriage is companionship. Your spouse is meant to be your most intimate companion in this life. During the honeymoon period, this friendship, love and longing for each other is natural—you are in a euphoric, exciting phase, experiencing butterflies, infatuation and new experiences. The length of this honeymoon varies for different people, and it could be a few weeks to many months, even a few years for some. However, if you are generally hard to please, get bored of things easily or constantly need new thrills, you can be ready for a quick end to the honeymoon.

In the case of one unfortunate couple I was counselling, an incident occurred very early in their marriage. The husband had a spontaneous temperament, and he was an avid fan of football (which at times seemed more beloved than his wife). Only a few days after getting married, while staying in a hotel during their honeymoon, a particularly high-profile football match was taking place, and the husband desperately wanted to watch it. The television in their hotel room was not working, so he sought his wife's permission to go down to the lobby to watch the match. She reluctantly accepted, not wanting to sour things so early in the relationship. He then returned to their room at 2 am, telling her how after the match he had remained "giving *da'wa*" to the other men who had watched the match in the lobby with him. This became a source of ill feeling and a thorn in their marriage. Particularly when spouses are just getting to know each other, they need to be very sensitive and to prioritise each other and the time they need to spend building their relation-

ship. While for many this would come naturally, this clearly was not the case for this couple.

When things settle to a new normal after the honeymoon period, when reality and the grind of day-to-day life hits, maintaining the spirit of companionship and seeing your spouse as a lifelong friend requires active effort. Many couples fail at this point. Spending quality time together and engaging in some kind of entertainment with one's spouse is important. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "Everything with which a man amuses himself is vain except three things: training his horse, playing with his wife, and shooting with his bow and arrow" (*Abū Dāwūd*, 2513; *Tirmidhī*, 1637).

There are many examples in the *sīra* of the Prophet ﷺ engaging in light-hearted entertainment with his spouses. Once, a group of Abyssinians were demonstrating a particular play with their spears in the Prophet's Mosque. He ﷺ stood with 'Ā'isha رضي الله عنها as she observed the play, her chin resting on his shoulder. When asked if she had seen enough, she said no, continuing to watch and testing him to see how long he would be willing to stand there while she watched the spectacle (see *Bukhārī*, 5190; *Muslim*, 892). There are many other well-known narrations about incidents concerning 'Ā'isha رضي الله عنها, such as how she and the Prophet ﷺ would race on foot and joke with one another.

Spending time together and doing activities that both husband and wife enjoy is important for fostering love and friendship throughout the many years they will be married. The entertainment should of course be lawful. Some people are simply too unimaginative and cannot think of things to do with their spouses. Whether it be taking up a new hobby together, reading, cooking a meal together, playing a boardgame like Scrabble or Articulate, following a religious lecture series, going on a hike, or showing romantic gestures and making time for intimacy, there are many different ways spouses can spend time bonding and strengthening their relationship.

At the same time, spouses should also beware of becoming too possessive of one another. This is not healthy. While you should be your husband or wife's best friend, this does not mean you are their

only friend. As well as enjoying activities together, it is also important to not be controlling but respect their space, their other friendships and their lawful hobbies.

Spouses should be wary of allowing their jobs to take over their lives to such an extent that they prevent them from spending sufficient quality time with their partners. At certain times in his life, a husband may have certain work pressures: when he is establishing himself in his path, or if he has particular deadlines, examinations, training or other pressing work commitments. A wife should be understanding that these are important and that at times of increased stress he may be busier than usual. She should remember that the husband is ultimately working on his career to provide for her and so this is an indirect expression of his love. However, this should not be the situation indefinitely. Allāh Most High mentions in the Qur'an,

﴿وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ﴾

And live with them in kindness (Nisā', 4:19).

Part of this kind treatment is that a husband be kind and affectionate toward his wife and spend time with her while giving her his undivided attention. It is of no benefit to spend all of your time working on your career while your home life goes up in flames.

A woman should similarly take care that, if and when she becomes a mother, she continue to give attention and time to her husband and not just to her children. Caring for babies can be overwhelming, but you are more likely to have a husband who is helpful and supportive if you take steps to ensure that he not feel he has been forgotten or replaced by your infant. Making time to maintain your intimate relationship is especially important in this regard (this will be discussed more in the next few chapters).

SOCIAL SKILLS AND COMMUNICATION

One of the most important factors needed to make a marriage work is social skills. Many people get married having given no thought

to reading up about or improving the way they communicate. The truth is that human relationships are complex and there are many skills required to navigate them successfully that simply do not come naturally to everyone. You could compare it to driving a car. One may think that they know how to drive a car without studying for the theory (or written) test. And it is true that you may be able to operate a car and drive from point A to B without an accident. But without the theoretical knowledge of the way the car works and the rules of the road, one is at great risk of misunderstanding the rules required to safely navigate the way, and are that much more likely to unknowingly drive inappropriately or to have a devastating collision. The social skills required for marriage are similar. We all think we know how to communicate with other people and we do it on a daily basis. However, there is much to be learnt regarding the best method of speaking to and dealing with others from a psychological perspective, a lot of which is not immediately obvious. Our times are further complicated by the overwhelming influence of social media, which is warping our understanding of what it means to be a "friend" to someone and how we communicate with one another. Your spouse is not someone you know from a messaging group or someone whose posts or tweets you "like." They are real, physical people that you interact with daily. You will have the most intimate, personal relationship with your husband or wife, more than with any other person. It is therefore imperative that each person getting married take the time to work on their social skills for marriage.

"Social skills" cover a vast range of principles and techniques. What follows here is just a selection of advice that, in my experience of consulting many Muslim couples on marriage issues, is very important.

First and foremost, we have alluded many times earlier in this book to understanding the differences between men and women. This is very true when it comes to our differing temperaments and communication styles. A famous relationship skills book discussing this at length is *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* by John Gray. In it he explains that the way we understand issues and our

differing perspectives really can be as though we are from different planets. A huge proportion of the day-to-day problems and arguments arising in marriage are the result of miscommunication, where one spouse misunderstands what the other has said or intended. We should try to see where the other person is coming from, their different reasoning, the perspective they have, and the consequences they can see regarding a certain issue. In these sorts of social issues, where there is not a clear-cut right or wrong viewpoint, the way men and women rationalise certain issues and the conclusions they draw can be vastly different. Try to step into your spouse's shoes. Do not close your mind and become obstinate and stubborn: "But I'm right, it's obvious! Why can't they see that?" You should try hard to really listen and empathise. A good marriage is not one where the spouses never argue. Far from it. A marriage with no argument is more likely indicating that there is an abusive or neglectful situation occurring where partners feel unable to speak their minds. A good marriage is one in which there is healthy argument and communication.

A good model for communicating is to listen attentively to your spouse and then to mirror what he or she has told you. This can also be referred to as reflective listening when the partner summarises in their own words what they understand the other to have said. It ensures that both of you know that the message has been clearly communicated and that you fully understand where he or she is coming from. Hearing your partner repeat or summarise what you have said is extremely validating and avoids misunderstandings. If the issue is something in which there is disagreement, you can then give your reasoning and when your spouse mirrors you, there is a healthy to and fro. This approach may seem somewhat unnatural at first but the more you practice, the more you will see the benefits.

It is also important to pick the right time for communication. Approaching an issue tactfully by taking into account the wider situation will play a huge part in how the discussion pans out. Timing is vital in many cases. It is simply foolish to start a discussion that may lead to an argument in front of one's children. This is a big no-no. Children are very sensitive to any tensions between their parents

and they inevitably notice and emulate the models of behaviour they see. Similarly, if one or the other spouse is particularly tired or stressed, they are unlikely to have the energy or mental strength to communicate well with the other. When a husband has just returned exhausted from a day of work or when the wife is busy getting the children to bed is not the time. Just as you should put yourself in your spouse's shoes during the discussion, you should also think about their perspective before the conversation even begins.

As for the content of the conversation, a key issue that married couples need to learn to deal with is criticism. We are all human, we are flawed and we inevitably make mistakes. Your spouse will know this about you better than anyone else. Nobody is perfect and you should both be willing and able to accept criticism from others as well as to constructively criticise someone else in an appropriate manner. If you are arrogant and cannot take criticism, or if you are too shy to speak your mind and end up bottling up your bitterness and resentment, this is a recipe for disaster. Criticism is important in every relationship, but it needs to be constructive, not negative and contentious. Negative criticism rarely works. For criticism to be constructive, it is often paired with praise and has a positive outlook. In one incident, Sālim, the grandson of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ narrates that the Prophet ﷺ said regarding his father, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, "What an excellent man 'Abdullāh is, if only he could perform optional prayers at night." Sālim said that after this, (his father) 'Abdullāh slept very little at night (*Bukhārī*, 3739).

You will find that after many years of marriage you have many criticisms to make of your spouse. You need to learn to pick your battles and cannot nit-pick every single thing that you do not like. This leads to the infamous issue of nagging. One spouse may try to reform the other but it is virtually impossible to completely change another person. Change comes from within. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ gave men very practical advice with regard to their womenfolk:

Treat women well, for they are created from a rib, and the most crooked portion of the rib is its upper part; if you try to straighten

it you will break it, and if you leave it, it will remain crooked. So treat women well (*Bukhārī*, 5186; *Muslim*, 1468).

The main thrust of this ḥadīth is to treat them with gentleness, abandoning any hope of making them perfect, and exercising beautiful patience in your dealing with them. Allāh says,

﴿وَأَنْ تَصْبِرُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ﴾

But that you be patient is better for you. Allāh is Most-Forgiving, Very-Merciful (*Nisā'*, 4:25).

So either exercise "patience" by avoiding marriage altogether or, if you do marry, then be patient in your interaction with them. Being created from a rib can refer literally to their origin, since our mother Ḥawwā' (Eve) ؑ was created from the highest rib of Ādam ؑ, which happened to be the most crooked one. You would break the rib before you straighten it. Furthermore, the ribs partially enclose and protect the chest cavity, where many vital organs (including the heart and the lungs) are located. They are curved on both sides of our bodies to create a cage to provide maximum protection; they could not have been straight. This is the sign of Allāh's perfection. The "crooked rib" is then to explain that a woman has all the characteristics required to perform her function of protecting her family and children. So if a man tries to change a woman to be like him, she would not be able to perform her function, which is mercy and protection of her loved ones.

It could also be taken figuratively in that women are generally seen by men to be emotional, too chatty, unforgiving, difficult to please, unreasonable, and unable to park the car properly, among the other things that men, rightly or wrongly, banter and complain about to each other. So men, if this is how you view women and that is their nature, then get over it and look at their positives so that you enjoy them rather than live a miserable life. Treat them with kindness, gentleness and perseverance against their "crookedness," for you have no other option. She will do things that may not make sense to you; just accept it.

The following is the advice of the Prophet ﷺ (in quotation marks) interspersed with some commentary, "A woman is created from a rib and cannot remain in one state," meaning, she will not always be how you want her to be, but will waver between thankfulness and ingratitude, obedience and disobedience, and contentment and discontentment. "So if you want to enjoy her, enjoy her despite her crookedness," since it cannot leave her. "And if you do try to straighten her" by exceeding limits and do not excuse her ways and overlook her deficiencies, "you will end up breaking her, and breaking her is divorcing her" (*Muslim*, 1468).

Similarly, for women, trying to straighten out the perceived flaws of your husband, whether by brute force or by the slow attrition of nagging them, is extremely detrimental to your relationship. It may be more commonly the case that a woman tries to rectify the perceived flaws of her husband. What she fails to see is that change must always come from within, and her efforts are most likely backfiring. There are ways to be a positive influence and this takes a long time. A loving and compassionate attitude with *taghwā* will prove much more effective than being critical and repeating oneself, and it is the best way to win people over. 'Ā'isha ؓ is particularly well known for her great tact and ways of winning over her husband. She reports an incident that took place between them:

Allāh's Messenger ﷺ said to me, "I know when you are pleased with me and I know when you are angry with me." I said, "Whence do you know that?" He said, "When you are pleased with me you say, 'No, by the Lord of Muḥammad,' but when you are angry with me you say, 'No, by the Lord of Ibrāhīm.'" I said, "Yes, but by Allāh, I leave nothing but your name, O Allāh's Messenger" (*Bukhārī*, 5228; *Muslim* 2439).

She confirmed her deep-rooted love by reassuring the Prophet ﷺ that it was only his name that she sometimes left out when upset, but he was always in her heart. Fallouts and disagreements even occurred between the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and his wives and between his daughter Faṭīma and her husband 'Alī ؓ. He ﷺ was the best of

creation, so do not be under any illusion that your marriage will be free of arguments. When your spouse does criticise you or you make a mistake—and it is something that is bound to happen time and again—you must develop the humility to be able to accept your mistake and to apologise. Saying sorry is not as simple as one might think. It is something that we have to learn and to practice. This is especially important if we have any trace of pride in our character. Anger, arrogance and ego prevent a person from apologising, even in times when they know full well that they are in the wrong. You gain more respect when you apologise; you don't lose it. The person who apologises first, whether they are the one in the right or the wrong, will get the most reward. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said,

I guarantee a house at the edge of Paradise for one who gives up arguing, even if he is in the right; and a house in the middle of Paradise for one who abandons lying even when joking; and a house in the highest part of Paradise for one who beautifies his conduct (*Abū Dāwūd*, 4800).

To succeed in marriage we must learn to act with humility. The Prophet ﷺ said, "The one who initiates the greeting is free of pride" (*Bayhaqī, Shu'ab al-Īmān*, 8407), meaning the one who breaks the deadlock and moves toward reconciliation first. It is when you lower yourself that Allāh raises you in rank. Each time your spouse points out one of your flaws, this should in fact be an opportunity for you to be thankful for the chance to rectify it and improve yourself.

Both of you should not hold grudges. Some wives have a habit of holding onto small issues, keeping them bottled up and allowing them to fester. There will inevitably be issues between you and your husband and you should try to nip them in the bud, dealing with the problem and moving on as soon as possible. Holding on to past issues will not make you feel any better and your husband will not be able to see how they are still upsetting you now. A husband may have his dinner and forget to clear up his plate, upon which his wife breaks out in anger over not only the plate but also all the previous months that he had not put the rubbish out. It does not make any

sense to bring up something from the past in an argument now. Overcome, forgive, express your point of view and put issues to rest. It is unfair to continuously judge your spouse's actions through a filter of past trauma.

Finally, when it comes to communication, it is important to be on the same wavelength with your spouse. This can be difficult when a couple is newly married. It can take some time to get used to each other, the way each one of you communicates and sees things, but after some time you mature together and can develop a shared understanding and common goals. Especially when it comes to issues like raising children, if one of you is too permissive this can cause big rifts between the spouses. Being on the same wavelength is a balance that both need to achieve and also something that needs to be maintained. As life goes on, people change and perspectives may alter. Spouses need to make active efforts to communicate and make sure they are in harmony and understanding each other. This relationship has a bearing on one's hereafter and requires this ongoing effort.

COMPASSION AND MERCY

The final key relationship advice to mention here for both spouses is the importance of having an attitude of compassion and mercy. Our current social climate promotes values of selfishness and self-gratification, of taking what we want and throwing away the rest. This way of thinking does not work in a human relationship. We deeply invest our emotions into our spouse. For this relationship to work, it has to be seen as a give-and-take situation, one requiring lots of compromise, love and giving preference to the other over yourself. This applies to both of you and not one spouse constantly giving preference and being walked over. The Islamic marriage is not about fulfilling the basic *fiqh* rulings of what is required of spouses but about living with *ihsān*, or excellence. You will both find problems you have with the other, but you should strive to apply *ḥusn al-ẓann*, that is, giving each other the benefit of the doubt, and to focus on

creation, so do not be under any illusion that your marriage will be free of arguments. When your spouse does criticise you or you make a mistake—and it is something that is bound to happen time and again—you must develop the humility to be able to accept your mistake and to apologise. Saying sorry is not as simple as one might think. It is something that we have to learn and to practice. This is especially important if we have any trace of pride in our character. Anger, arrogance and ego prevent a person from apologising, even in times when they know full well that they are in the wrong. You gain more respect when you apologise; you don't lose it. The person who apologises first, whether they are the one in the right or the wrong, will get the most reward. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said,

I guarantee a house at the edge of Paradise for one who gives up arguing, even if he is in the right; and a house in the middle of Paradise for one who abandons lying even when joking; and a house in the highest part of Paradise for one who beautifies his conduct (*Abū Dāwūd*, 4800).

To succeed in marriage we must learn to act with humility. The Prophet ﷺ said, "The one who initiates the greeting is free of pride" (*Bayhaqī, Shu'ab al-Īmān*, 8407), meaning the one who breaks the deadlock and moves toward reconciliation first. It is when you lower yourself that Allāh raises you in rank. Each time your spouse points out one of your flaws, this should in fact be an opportunity for you to be thankful for the chance to rectify it and improve yourself.

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the positive. Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه relates that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "A believer should not despise his wife, for if there is any quality he dislikes in her he will certainly be pleased with another" (*Muslim*, 1469). The indication here is that no one is free of defect, and if you seek someone without defect you will remain alone without friend or spouse. Conversely, everyone, especially a believer, will have some good traits. Focus on them and they will satisfy you.

It is observed that when the nightingale enters an orchard, it looks for the nicest flowers and alights by them, whereas a pig enters the orchard looking for the filth and mud. It is up to you to raise your thinking to a higher level by looking for the best in your partner, assuming good of them and trying to create positivity in your relationship.

This positive vibe and good energy between you can be seen like a bank account. You need to regularly deposit positivity into the love bank by saying kind words, being affectionate, and doing things for the other without them asking. There will inevitably be ups and downs and points of contention. If you have deposited enough love into the bank, you can withdraw during these difficult times without going overdrawn in your relationship. By having lots of love, positivity, and fond memories between you, you will realise in those difficult times, when you are mulling over an argument and trying to think of a way to win or get back at the other, that this situation is an exception and you generally have a good life and a happy relationship. This will make it easier to reconcile.

Finally, the strength of prayer cannot be underestimated for the success of marriages. A very effective Qur'ānic *du'ā'* in this regard is:

﴿رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا﴾

Rabbanā hab lanā min azwājinā wa dhurriyyātinā qurrata a'yun[iw],
wa 'j-alnā li 'l-muttaqīna imāmā,

Our Lord, grant us spouses and progeny who will be the joy of our eyes, and make us good examples for the righteous (Furqān, 25:74).

You should faithfully supplicate with this prayer, remain positive, focus on the good and ignore the defects as the ḥadīth above advises. Scholars have suggested, and experience shows, that by doing the above, Allāh will either remove your spouse's defects and shortcomings altogether, or He will at least satisfy you in a way that you will no longer be bothered by them. So positive thought and heartfelt prayer to your Lord will provide you with a happy relationship.

The above is only a small collection of thoughts that spouses can apply to build a successful marriage, but there is much more to know and learn. Every person married or preparing for marriage should take time to develop their understanding of marriage, relationships and communication skills. By taking these steps and making *du'ā'* for Allāh's assistance, we may see many more marriages flourish and successfully overcome the obstacles they face.

William Shakespeare wrote (in "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments," *Sonnet 116*),

Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds,
or bends with the remover to remove:
Oh, no! It is an ever-fixed mark.
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
it is the star to every wandering bark,
whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool,
though rosy lips and cheeks within his bending sickle's compass come;
love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
but bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

As well as the general advice above that applies to both men and women, here are seven points that husbands and wives specifically can benefit from in building a successful marriage.

ADVICE FOR HUSBANDS

1. *Show affection:* One of the primary needs of your wife in marriage is affection. You may know that you love her, and may be going out and working hard to earn money to support her and your children. Does this not show enough that you love her? The simple answer is no. Your wife needs to be shown that you love her, whether that be telling her so, doing kind things for her and showing gestures of affection. This includes touching her in a way that is not sexual every time. This could be a hug, holding her hand, stroking her hair or taking time to just sit side by side. Human touch appears to be an innate need. Studies show that touch contains several health benefits for our physiological and psychological wellbeing. For instance, holding hands with the spouse helps to dissipate stress. Hugging induces the bonding hormone oxytocin, which helps to lower the heart rate and blood pressure, reducing stress and lowering cortisol levels, and thus increasing a sense of security and trust.¹ These small things make a big difference, and need to be done on a regular basis to remind your wife that you have this affection toward her.

2. *Be a man:* Your role in marriage is to be a man. This does not mean throwing your weight around, being lazy and expecting to be provided everything on a platter, and leaving your things lying around assuming they will be cleaned up after you; rather it means being a real man. You should strive to read more of the *sīra* to find out about how the best man to have lived, the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, behaved. Be chivalrous and dignified. Act maturely. Learn what good leadership means. When you play your role as the true man of the family, your wife can act as the woman of the family. The Prophet ﷺ would help at home, patching his own clothes, milking the animals and serving himself and his family. When you do this, your wife will love you more and it will create love and positivity in your relationship. If you do not fix the broken tap or get the car repaired and the situation remains the same for many months, your wife will eventually be unable to

¹ <https://psychcentral.com/blog/the-surprising-psychological-value-of-human-touch> (accessed 28/10/2018).

put up with these things and get it done herself. This will upset the balance. If you want her to be womanly then you need to be manly and sort things out. Similarly, a man who makes his wife financially responsible and forced to work is simply an oppressor. It is a matter of chivalry and self-respect that he sustain her. I know of an example of a practising man who could not find what he deemed “*ḥalāl*” work that was completely free of mixing with the opposite gender, so he instead sent his wife, who wore a *niqāb*, out to work. This situation is completely upside down. A man who does not provide (when he is capable of doing so) is simply not a man.

3. *Praise and compliment:* Tell your wife she is beautiful, regularly. As a Muslim woman who does not flaunt herself in public for all to see, you are her sole source of physical admiration. Especially in our times when the fashion and beauty industries promote unrealistic expectations of women, your wife will not be immune to insecurities about her appearance. A woman wants to be desired, and for her to feel this is a big part of your marital relationship. By reminding her that she is beautiful, you will give her more confidence and she will be more inclined to keep up her appearance and make an effort for you in return.

4. *Look nice for her:* Make an effort to look nice for your wife. There is often an emphasis on a woman taking time to maintain her figure and to wear nice clothes for her husband, but the same goes the other way around too. The companion ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās ؓ is reported to have said, “I like to adorn myself for my wife just as I like her to adorn herself for me, because Allāh (His name be elevated) says, ‘And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness’” (Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 4:120).

Make sure to keep on top of your personal hygiene, to wash, brush, comb and dress yourself nicely. It is a *sunna* for men to wear perfume, but avoid the heavy ones she may not like. Many men who before marriage had a rigorous gym routine tend to let it all go by the wayside sometime after the wedding, now that he is getting to enjoy tasty homecooked food and does not have a potential bride to impress. Your wife is the one you should still be trying to impress.

5. *Don't expect your wife to be like your mother:* If this is the case, you should probably stay home living with your mother rather than get married. Your wife is an independent person with her own preferences and unique way of doing things. She will not cook in exactly the same way as your mother, and you should avoid making such comparisons. The best way to avoid the wife-versus-mother difficulty that some husbands face is to give each their rights due from you as their husband or son, and to encourage a healthy friendship between them rather than expecting imitation and pitting one against the other (more on this below in the section on in-laws).

6. *Listen to her:* Women often prefer to talk through their concerns and feelings to work things out as opposed to the way men typically like to spend time alone to mull over their thoughts. Sometimes your wife will want to talk and will need you to provide a friendly listening ear, without her wanting concrete "solutions" or "outcomes" from you. Just hold her hands and listen. This may be very different to how you operate. If your wife speaks a lot, you need to learn to multitask and still communicate with her. Importantly, you should never *pretend* you are listening. It is quite common for a person to be browsing on their phone, watching a video clip, a sports channel or engaged on a messaging app while also trying to listen to someone. This is not good practice. If you are unable to multitask properly, you should stop what you are doing, turn to face her and pay full attention. This is the *sunna* of Allāh's Messenger ﷺ when communicating with someone.

7. *Provide positive encouragement:* As a husband you should respect and encourage your wife's interests, including helping to make time for them. This applies particularly once a woman has children. The job of taking care of young children and the real effort required to run a home is no small thing. A woman can very easily find herself giving all of herself and her time to others. It might seem useful to you on the surface that your wife devote more and more of her time to help you and the children, but in reality, if she loses her sense of self-worth and individual identity she will not be of use to anyone. The expectation of constant sacrifice from the wife

and that her wider interests beyond being a wife and mother will disappear is not Islamic.

As well as specific interests that she has, a husband should also actively encourage his wife to study Islam further. While this applies for both spouses, it is well known that women face more obstacles in the path of seeking sacred knowledge. The mother's lap is the first *madrassa*, as the saying goes, and your wife will need sound knowledge of religion to raise the next generation. If you are not supportive this will be very difficult for her.

ADVICE FOR WIVES

1. *Respect:* One of the most important needs of your husband, if not the most important, is respect. For a marriage to function, he needs this from you even more than love. To take on the financial burden of the family and to bear the responsibility for its spiritual and worldly success is a big undertaking. He needs a wife who is supportive and respects his role as the leader of the family, not someone who consistently undermines him and doubts his capability. By showing this respect, you increase his love for you. When you treat him like a King, he will treat you like a Queen. Maybe this is why the Prophet ﷺ remarked, "If I were to command anyone to prostrate for anyone, I would have commanded women to prostrate before their husbands, because of the right Allāh has granted husbands over their wives" (*Abū Dāwūd*, 2140; *Tirmidhī*, 1159 without last clause).

2. *Be a woman:* A wife should be feminine. That is your role. If you want your husband to be chivalrous and masculine, you need to act in a feminine manner. A successful marriage comes about when spouses appreciate their differences and fulfil their respective roles. It is true that opposites attract and your husband is drawn to your femininity. This includes you making an effort to maintain a healthy body and your physical attractiveness. Your husband faces temptations outside the home on a daily basis and will appreciate you keeping up your appearance, whether that be maintaining your

personal hygiene, exercising, dressing well, wearing makeup or perfume (at home) and doing your hair. It is the act of making an effort that counts, not that you have to be more beautiful than anyone he ever sees. Many women describe the phenomenon of "*hijabi neglect*," where sisters make less effort on their physical appearance when they start wearing *hijāb* as they do not show off in public. Your husband will feel deflated if he comes home to see you in your sleeping gown or pyjamas day after day while you go all out to dress up for a wedding. You should first and foremost take care of yourself and your appearance for your own self, to maintain your own self-confidence. Then, the person you make most effort for should be your husband. But be conscious of your husband's preferences. Some men may not fancy certain types of makeup or any at all. If your husband is of this type, don't spend a lot of time applying makeup just to be disappointed that he doesn't show enough appreciation for this.

3. *Express your feelings and needs clearly and effectively:* Men can be very simple in the way they think about certain things, and while you may think that something is obvious, your husband may have no idea what you are thinking. This is not because he is inconsiderate but because you are thinking on completely different wavelengths. The longer you live with him, the more you will learn about the way he thinks, but we are always learning and this process will take time. Until the day comes that you are both able to read minds, you should be clear in expressing your perspective without making assumptions. Wives can tend to expect things without communicating them, so to avoid any misunderstanding you should be clear about what you want. Be direct. Do not just drop hints and then get angry that your husband doesn't get it. If he is not getting something, always try to give him the benefit of the doubt.

4. *Give him his space:* One of the complaints of many women is that a husband comes home from work and does not want to speak. He just lies down, watches TV, or is on his phone and is not communicative. This is just men. Sometimes your husband will need silence, especially after a long day of work. He wants some time to himself, time to collect his thoughts and to relax alone. In many

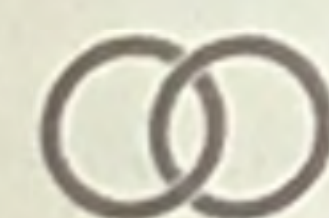
relationship advice books, this is known as "the cave." This is not because he does not like the wife or spending time with her and the children. A wife should be understanding of this aspect of a man's nature. Unless there is a bigger problem, he should emerge from his cave eventually. A woman faced with this situation and who cannot understand the silence should try to leave him alone for a while and to find someone else to talk to in the interim. A quick call to catch up with your mother or a friend may give you all the social contact you were craving while your husband has his alone time.

5. *Speak to him about his problems, not to others:* This is a big failing in relationships, where a wife may start going elsewhere, talking to friends, parents, even their children about issues she is having with her husband. If you, the one in the relationship, cannot deal with the issue, how do you expect other people to help? You are the one who knows him best as you are the one that lives with him. You can, of course, ask for sincere advice if you are dealing with a big problem that you have been unable to resolve yourself, and similarly in abusive situations. But the habit of some wives complaining about their husbands when there is no benefit or need is plain backbiting. People do not need entertaining with yet another soap or drama. Spouses are obligated to keep each other's secrets. The same goes for when other people start complaining to you about their husbands. If you are faced with this situation, you should ask them to stop, as it is a sin for them and can also have a negative effect on your relationship as well.

6. *Be considerate and moderate in your expectations:* Your husband bears a big burden in his financial obligations toward his family. He needs to provide not only the bread for today but to plan for a secure financial situation in the future. It is enough to keep many men awake at night with concern. You should not add to his burden by expecting things that are beyond his means. Gifts should be a pleasant surprise, not an expectation. A wife should spend sensibly the money her husband provides her for running the home. Do not expect your spouse to be a superhero or like someone else's husband. When you look to other people who have a "better" standard of living, a bigger house and nicer furniture, and feel bad that your husband does

not earn as much as such-and-such a person, this is a sign of being discontent with what Allāh has given you. Making comparisons to other people's husbands or others' standards of living can be a huge blow to his self-confidence. Show your husband you appreciate his efforts and avoid creating problems by being too demanding.

7. *Roll with the changes:* A woman's life involves many significant changes. Typically, she moves from the house in which she was brought up to live with her husband. She may have to move to a different part of the country or even abroad. She will have something like a new life, a new setup and new family members to get to know. She should be prepared to accept that her situation will not be like the way she was brought up with her family and she should strive to be open and flexible. She may have to move again many times if her husband's work demands it and will have other changes to deal with, such as the significant change of becoming a mother. There may be times of financial hardship. Both spouses will also change over time, in age, strength, temperament, weight and youth. Some couples have reported noticing significant changes in themselves approximately every ten years. Husband and wife should both deal with these changes with utmost love and mercy and be understanding of each other. A woman in particular should appreciate that her life is bound to be constantly full of change, and should embrace it. This life is temporary, after all, and she will *inshā Allāh* find her perfect life in Paradise.



Chapter 7



SEXUAL INTIMACY, ROMANCE AND ETIQUETTE

One of the primary functions of marriage is for both spouses to gain happiness, *sukūn* and tranquillity. A significant part of this is the human need for intimacy and sexual fulfilment. Allāh Most High created in the human being a desire for intimacy, both as a drive for procreation but importantly as a means of finding happiness and contentment. The pleasure of an intimate union between two loving spouses is a glimpse into the eternal pleasure, and a small sample of the happiness, to be found in the next life. It is not just about physical gratification or ending an urge. Given the right environment, it can provide a spiritual and emotional state of psycho-spiritual arousal and gratification. A wife and husband should make an effort to be in a state of connectedness to make sexual intimacy a pleasure and not a chore that leaves resentment. Having a healthy sexual relationship is thus a big part of marriage. Many seemingly unrelated problems may arise for a couple over the course of their married life where a problem with intimacy was the root cause.

People who are married or getting married must take the time to understand the importance of a mutually healthy sexual relationship. It is not a subject that should be shied away from or considered taboo. By not discussing this vital aspect of marriage, we run the risk of inadequately preparing couples for this vital aspect of their

relationship, and problems arising in this department can easily lead to further issues and potentially divorce. Rather than avoid it, we must deal with the subject in an appropriate and dignified manner. There is a great need for Islamically suitable literature and resources on intimacy and romance for married couples. One such resource that we can recommend is Mufti Muhammad ibn Adam al-Kawthari's *Islamic Guide to Sexual Relations* (Turath Publishing, 2008). This comprehensively discusses many of the technical aspects of intimacy and sexual relations in Islam, and the guiding principles to be found in the Qur'an and Sunna on the topic.

What follows in this chapter is a more general discussion about a healthy intimate relationship. In my experience counselling couples and speaking to many about the Islamic perspective on intimacy and romance, it has become apparent that this is a huge area which needs to be thoroughly and appropriately addressed. It is one thing for a person to read a list of do's and don'ts and be aware of what is and isn't allowed in the bedroom. It is quite another thing for him or her to know what the real function of intimacy is, to understand what men and women need and want from this aspect of their marital relationship, and to learn to apply this intimacy with their spouse.

Nowhere is the difference between the genders clearer than when discussing the sexual needs of men and women. Although each individual is unique and there are exceptions, certain principles about the needs of men and women hold true for the majority of people. Of these, one of the most fundamental is to be able to distinguish between different types of affection. Generally speaking, these fall into two types: a *caring* type of affection, such as the tender love a mother shows toward her children, versus *sexual* love or affection. Women tend to have more of the former as a natural disposition, while men generally have more of the sexual type. Thus, a woman loves to be treated with gifts and kind words, while a man feels more loved when he is able to enjoy the visual beauty of his wife and when she makes herself sexually available for him. A successful intimate relationship requires that both learn more about the other side and display a balance between these differing types of affection. Women

must learn to express themselves sexually, while men must learn to act more gently and affectionately.

Especially in this day and age, sexual fulfilment is incredibly important. We live in an increasingly sexualised society, and there is great reward to be found with Allāh for the one who sets out with the correct intentions in fulfilling their sexual needs and those of their spouse in a lawful way. The Prophet ﷺ said, "In the sexual act of each of you there is a charity." The Companions asked, "Messenger of Allāh, one of us fulfils his sexual desire and he is given a reward for that?" He replied, "If he were to place his desire in something unlawful, would he not be sinning? Thus, if he fulfils it in something lawful, he will be rewarded" (*Muslim*, 1006).

INTIMACY IN THE HONEYMOON PHASE

In the newfound euphoria and happiness of being freshly married, a couple enjoy an unprecedented period of excitement. To have someone to love, to be affectionate with and to enjoy a sexual relationship with is a newfound experience. This is especially exciting for someone who has not committed other sins before marriage such as masturbation, pornography, and illicit sexual relations. Someone who finds themselves plagued with any such problems must strive to wean themselves off them as quickly as possible.

For the new couple, intimacy is exciting but can also be a cause for nervousness and uncertainty. Effective communication, taking things slowly and approaching sexual relations with care and consideration such that both spouses are completely comfortable are very important. Over time *inshā Allāh* you will learn more about each other, more about yourselves, and how you can together achieve an enjoyable and mutually satisfying sexual relationship.

THE FIRST NIGHT

Regarding the first night after marriage, it is not necessary or a *sunna* to have full sexual intercourse. Both of you will be tired from the

relationship, and problems arising in this department can easily lead to further issues and potentially divorce. Rather than avoid it, we must deal with the subject in an appropriate and dignified manner. There is a great need for Islamically suitable literature and resources on intimacy and romance for married couples. One such resource that we can recommend is Muftī Muhammad ibn Adam al-Kawthari's *Islamic Guide to Sexual Relations* (Turath Publishing, 2008). This comprehensively discusses many of the technical aspects of intimacy and sexual relations in Islam, and the guiding principles to be found in the Qur'ān and Sunna on the topic.

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THE FIRST NIGHT

Regarding the first night after marriage, it is not necessary or a *sunna* to have full sexual intercourse. Both of you will be tired from the

ceremonies and may wish to just spend the time relaxing and getting to know one another or getting a good night's sleep. When it comes to breaking the ice, this should be relatively easy if you have done your due diligence in terms of finding a spouse with whom you are compatible in the first place. If the occasion for intimacy comes this is fine, but there will be plenty of time for it at a later stage. Women should avoid trying to play hard-to-get, and men should take things easy. It can be difficult to become very close and intimate with someone who is a relative stranger. It is also possible that a person has been through abuse or other problems and has an aversion to intimacy. One could expect some natural inhibition or reservation at this stage as the couple may just be getting to know each other. They should praise each other and their looks, as many may feel insecure about themselves. The situation needs care, compassion and for both spouses to be patient and understanding. The focus should be psychological bonding, developing confidence and nurturing the spiritual foundation of this sacred union.

There are some other practical recommendations for this night.

1. The couple should offer two *rak'as* of prayer together in congregation (Ṭabarānī, *Al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ*, 4018).

2. The husband is also advised to hold his wife's forelock and to recite the following prayer (the wife may also make this prayer for the husband, after adapting the words for the masculine in the brackets):

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ خَيْرَهَا [خَيْرُهُ] وَخَيْرَ مَا جَبَلْتَهَا [جَبَلْتُهُ] عَلَيْهِ، وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ شَرِّهَا [شَرِّهِ]، وَشَرِّ مَا جَبَلْتَهَا [جَبَلْتُهُ] عَلَيْهِ

Allāhumma innī as'aluka khayrahā [kayrahū] wa khayra mā jabaltahā [jabaltahū] 'alayhi, wa a-'ūdhu bika min sharrihā [sharrihī] wa sharri mā jabaltahā [jabaltahū] 'alayhi,

O Allāh, I ask You for the good in her [him] and the good You have predisposed her [him] to, and I seek your protection from her [his] evil and the evil You have predisposed her [him] to (*Abu Dāwūd*, 2160).

This should help to keep the Satan away, whose goal is to drive apart what Allāh has permitted.

3. It is recommended to give a special gift at this time as this helps to develop affection and love for one another. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Give gifts to one another and you will increase in love" (Bukhārī, *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 594; Ṭabarānī, *Al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ*, 7240). For example, if either spouse had bought a ring or other such jewellery or gifts, this would be the time to give it. Gifts on this night would be treated as personal and sincere while gifts at other times, such as during the wedding reception, may be seen as ritualistic and based on family or cultural demands.

4. A husband could also offer his new bride something to drink. This is found in the ḥadīth of Asmā' bint Yazīd ibn al-Sakan who said, "I beautified 'Ā'isha for Allāh's Messenger ﷺ, then called him to come to see her unveiled. He came and sat next to her and brought a large cup of milk from which he drank. He then offered it to 'Ā'isha, but she lowered her head and felt shy. I scolded her and said to her, 'Take from the hand of the Prophet ﷺ.' She then took it and drank some" (*Musnad Aḥmad*, 27591).

5. Finally, if they do decide to get intimate and make love, the couple should recite the following supplication:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ، اللَّهُمَّ جَنِّبْنَا الشَّيْطَانَ، وَجَنِّبِ الشَّيْطَانَ مَا رَزَقْنَا

Bismi 'Llāh(i), Allāhumma jannibna 'sh-shayṭān(a), wa jannibi 'sh-shayṭāna mā razaqtanā,

In the name of Allāh, O Allāh, distance us from Satan and distance Satan from what you grant us.

This prayer should be memorised by the couple and made any time they engage in sexual intercourse, for the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said if the couple were to be blessed with a child during such a union Satan could never be able to harm it (*Bukhārī*, 6388; *Muslim*, 1436).

Another point is that it is forbidden to reveal the details of one's sexual intimacy to others. Some newlyweds are pressured by friends to reveal the details of their first night encounter. This is absolutely

abhorrent and a betrayal of their partner's trust. The Prophet ﷺ warned, "Among the most evil people according to Allāh on the Day of Judgement is a man who has sexual relations with his wife and she with him, then he spreads her secrets" (*Muslim*, 1437). In another ḥadīth, he ﷺ said, "Do not do this, for it is like a male Satan who meets a female Satan on the road and has sexual intercourse with her while people are watching" (*Musnad Aḥmad*, 27583).

As a final word, do not play jokes on the wedding night. Things can go very wrong and can have long-standing repercussions. We should avoid picking up negative social practices such as friends playing a prank on the bride and groom; the situation may unfold unfavourably and lead to one or other spouse holding a sour feeling about it for a very long time. This is not a good way to start the marriage.

ROMANCE

It is extremely important to learn about romance from an Islamic perspective. Classically, a number of books have been written about sexual etiquette and romance by scholars. It is not the case that "romance" is an un-Islamic, Bollywood concept that is not relevant to the Muslim couple. Rather, it is essential that spouses show affection and keep the spark of their relationship as friends and lovers alive. It is essential to be romantic in a marriage. It may be the case that you have never seen this in your family. In some cultures it is not acceptable for wives and husbands to even sit next to each other. It is not uncommon to find in villages in some developing countries that a house is arranged with all the family members having single beds in one large room. It is a wonder how anyone found any privacy at all. Even our western societies not too long ago had a very prudish attitude toward sexuality and the intimate relationship. Things have now gone way overboard in the opposite direction in what we see in the over-sexualisation of society.

Conversely, Islam has had a balanced outlook from the outset. There are many narrations talking about the intimate relationship between spouses, and there is much to be said about Islamically appropriate romance. We need qualified discussions and *ḥalāl* literary sources on these issues in light of the Qur'ān and Sunna, and it can no longer be considered a taboo subject. Mufti Muhammad ibn Adam gives some ideas in his *Guide*.

Spouses can say kind, sweet words to one another, making a point to give a kiss, touch or hug them, or to pay a compliment each time they pass. They can buy flowers and gifts, cook special meals, write each other love poems and have "*ḥalāl* date nights," among many other ideas, but at the same time we avoid public displays of affection. The Islamic approach is one that is dignified and addresses the natural disposition of human beings. The above steps regarding romance will *inshā Allāh* ensure that spouses maintain closeness and affection in their relationship, and this should have a positive effect on their more intimate relationship.

PUBLIC DISPLAYS OF AFFECTION (PDA)

Not showing physical affection publicly does not indicate a lack of love for another person. The Prophet ﷺ raced with his beloved wife 'Ā'isha رضي الله عنها and stood in the privacy of his doorway with her chin resting on his shoulder to have her watch an Abyssinian performance, but he is not reported to have hugged or kissed any of his wives in public. Of course, if there is a need to hold hands to help each other along through a crowded area, such as during the pilgrimage, or when crossing a busy intersection or the like, it would be permitted and maybe even advisable. If there is no such need and a couple want to just causally hold hands without any display of affection or sexual innuendo, it would depend on the custom of the place. If it is not deemed offensive it should be fine.

THE SEXUAL NEEDS OF WOMEN

This and the following section on the sexual needs of men contain some explicit discussions and could be considered inappropriate by some unmarried individuals. It may be advisable for them to read these sections just before or even after marriage.

As well as "romance" having been an avoided subject, the sexual needs of women specifically have long been neglected. In most western societies, well into the early twentieth century, it was assumed that women do not experience sexual pleasure. The vibrator itself was created as women were previously being taken to doctors to induce orgasm to treat them for "hysteria," which was later just recognised as sexual frustration. Husbands were not satisfying their wives and instead a doctor would be called upon, and the vibrator was invented to save them the trouble.

It is now well known that women also have sexual needs. However, there are still many misunderstandings in some cultures about this. Islam is very open about the need for sexual fulfilment for both spouses. People generally understand that men have a need as a man's sexual needs are obvious. There is an evident, clear change in the way his desire is aroused and satisfied. For women this need is more subtle and unjustly overlooked. It is narrated by Zayd ibn Aslam that 'Umar ibn al Khattāb ؓ was patrolling at night while he was the caliph of the Muslims, and passed by a house where a woman was inside reciting some verses of poetry. In it she said,

تَطَاوَلَ هَذَا اللَّيْلُ وَأَسْوَدَ جَانِبُهُ وَطَالَ عَلَيَّ أَنْ لَا خَلِيلَ أُلَاعِبُهُ
فَوَاللَّهِ لَوْ لَا خَشْيَةُ اللَّهِ وَحْدَهُ لَحَرَّكَ مِنْ هَذَا السَّرِيرِ جَوَانِبُهُ

This night is so long, both ends of it are so dark,

It goes so slowly for I have no husband I can play with,
By Allāh, were it not for the fear of Allāh alone
The four sides of this bed would have shook.

'Umar ؓ in the morning sent someone to find out who the woman was. It was said that she was So-and-so and that her husband was

out in the path of Allāh as a warrior. 'Umar ؓ recognised the gravity of the situation and sent a woman to keep her company and had her husband called back. He then went to his daughter Ḥafṣa ؓ and asked her for the maximum amount of time it would be reasonable to expect a woman to be away from her husband. She suggested four or six months, and so this limit was set for those on military campaigns. (See *Sunan Sa'īd ibn Manṣūr*, 2463; Bayhaqī, *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 17850.) Interestingly, this is the time frame adopted by the Tablighi Jamāt too for those who go out to invite to the path of Allāh.

In another incident, a woman came to speak to 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb ؓ about her husband. She explained that he fasts every day and prays all night and that she dislikes to complain about him as he is engaged in worship. 'Umar ؓ kept responding by saying, "What a great husband is yours!" to which she kept repeating the same statement, too shy to explain the real problem she was facing. Ka'b ibn Sūr al-Azdī, who was present, explained that she was actually complaining that the husband did not come to her bed. 'Umar ؓ said to Ka'b that, since he Ka'b had understood her issue, he should be the one to make the decision in her case. Ka'b called for her husband. When the husband arrived and was informed that his wife had filed a complaint about him, he asked if it were about food or drink. The husband was told no, and the couple then took turns presenting their case in lines of poetry:

The wife said,

يَا أَيُّهَا الْقَاضِي الْحَكِيمُ رُشْدُهُ أَلْهَى خَلِيلِي عَنْ فِرَاشِي مَسْجِدُهُ
رَهَّاهُ فِي مَضْجَعِي تَعَبُهُ نَهَاهُ وَلَيْلَهُ مَا يَرْقُدُهُ
فَلَسْتُ فِي حُكْمِ النِّسَاءِ أَحْمَدُهُ قَافِضُ الْقَضَا يَا كَغَبُ لَا تُرِدُّهُ

O magistrate of good and wise judgment,

My husband's prostration place has distracted him from my bed,
His devotion has caused him to relinquish lying with me,

Both in his night and day he doesn't sleep

So I do not praise him with regard to women

So make the right decision, O Ka'b, and don't let him get away

The husband replied,

زَمَدَنِي فِي فَرْشِهَا وَفِي الْحَجَلِ أَنِّي أَمْرُؤُ أَذْهَلَنِي مَا قَدْ نَزَلَ
فِي سُورَةِ النَّحْلِ وَفِي السَّبْعِ الطُّوْلِ وَفِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ تَخَوِّفُ جَلَلَ

What has caused me to forsake her bed and chamber
Is that I am a man who has been occupied by the revelation
In Sūrat al-Nahl and the seven lengthy chapters
and the Book of Allāh contains formidable admonitions.

To which Ka'b responded,

إِنَّ لَهَا حَقًّا عَلَيْكَ يَا رَجُلُ تُصِيبُهَا فِي أَرْبَعٍ لِمَنْ عَقَلَ
فَضِيئَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهَا عَزَّ وَجَلَّ فَأَعْطَهَا ذَلِكَ وَدَعَّ عَنْكَ الْعِلَلَ
إِنَّ خَيْرَ الْقَاضِي مَنْ عَدَلَ وَقَضَى بِالْحَقِّ جَهْرًا وَفَصَلَ

She had rights over you, O man,
Go to her every four nights, for the one who comprehends,
Tis a decree from our Lord Most Mighty Majestic,
So give her that and abandon these excuses from yourself
The best judge is one who does justice
And decrees the truth openly and clearly.

The rationale behind Ka'b's judgement was that a man is technically allowed up to four wives, and if it had been the case that the husband had four, this wife would minimally have been entitled to one in every four nights. However, instead of taking other wives the husband can dedicate those nights to worship instead. 'Umar ؓ said to him, "By Allāh, I am not sure what to be more amazed about, the fact that you perceived their situation well or your judgement between them. He then appointed him judge of Basra. What is yet more astonishing is what the woman then said according to one report:

O Commander of the faithful, by Allāh, I do not have a desire for that which women desire of men, except that I have seen him standing the nights seeking forgiveness for his parents, and I hoped

that Allāh would bring forth from me and him a child that would seek forgiveness for me and him.¹

What we can clearly see from these and other examples from the Qur'an and Sunna is that women have a need for sexual fulfilment. There is a difference in the needs of men and women, and this must be discussed and understood for married couples to find fulfilment in their relationships. I have personally heard many stories of couples with problems in this area. A discussion took place in the recent past between five women discussing romance and sex in Islam. Two of the five said that they had never experienced an orgasm. There could be many reasons for this, but it is possible that their husbands were doing something wrong. There are many women who fall into this category, and this lack of fulfilment can present itself as frustration, which the husband then does not seem to understand, and it can lead to problems in other aspects of the marriage. Both spouses are entitled to sexual fulfilment from their intimate relations.

One of the difficulties is that many couples do not understand the difference in arousal and satisfaction between men and women. Scientifically, the human sexual response cycle follows a general pattern of four phases—initial excitement, a plateau, a peak or climax during which a person experiences orgasm, followed by resolution in which arousal and tension dissipates. Orgasm can also be understood as the momentary loss of self on such a union, something similar to a momentary death. Generally speaking, for men the initial excitement and the climb to a high level of sexual arousal is relatively fast and is quickly fulfilled. On the other hand, women tend to take much longer to be stimulated, though they may have a stronger orgasm when they reach it. Some have likened it to men's arousal acting like a microwave, immediately turned on and quickly switched off, while a woman is like a crockpot or oven that takes some time to heat up. This difference can lead to problems if a husband is unaware of the

¹ This story can be found in the following sources with slight variances: Ibn al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntazam*, 5:115; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Al-Istī'āb*, 3:1320; Ibn Kathīr, *Musnad al-Fārūq*, 2:187; Atyūbi al-Wallawī, *Dhakhīrat al-Uqba fī Sharḥ al-Mujtabā*, 28:35.

needs of his wife and fulfils his need before hers. A man typically experiences tiredness after his orgasm and may go to sleep, assuming that his wife probably enjoyed herself enough up to that point. This leaves her hanging, having been taken 50–75% of the way toward sexual satisfaction and left wanting. This can be extremely frustrating for a woman, and repeated many times over the course of a couple's married life it can have devastating effects on the quality of their relationship. The great Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisi (d. 620/1223) writes:

It is preferable to enjoy foreplay with his wife before sexual penetration to arouse her desire, so that she receives a similar pleasure to his from the lovemaking. It is related from 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Do not make love to her until she has experienced desire similar to what you have, lest you climax before she does." I [the interlocutor] asked, "Is that on me?" He said, "Yes, you should kiss her, feel her with your hands and touch her (*talmizuhā*). When you feel that she is as aroused as you then you should make love to her."

Ibn Qudāma continues,

If he finishes before she does, it is undesirable for him to withdraw from her until she finishes too, based on what is related from Anas ibn Mālik ؓ that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "When a person makes love to his wife he should do so well with sincerity [affection, compassion, and love] (*falyaṣduḡhā*). If he does fulfil his desire before she fulfils hers, he should wait until she finishes" [*Musnad Abū Ya'la al-Mawṣilī*, 4201]. Also because it is harmful to her and prevents her from fulfilling her desire (Ibn Qudāma, *Al-Mughnī*, 7:300).

What insight! Keeping this in mind, it is important to give enough time to the wife to be prepared for her climax through foreplay. She may be too shy to articulate what she wants, so ask her what she likes, what makes her feel better, what you would like her to do to you. Listen to her voice, look into her eyes, watch her body movements,

and respond accordingly. If a husband finds that he is getting aroused too fast and has difficulty slowing down, he should try to focus less on himself and more on helping the wife get more excited such that she reaches orgasm first or they orgasm together. Some suggest that if the husband makes it a habit to help his wife orgasm at least once (or even twice) before he does, it would be the best practice. It is generally easier for a woman to continue after her orgasm to help the man reach his climax than the other way around. After he climaxes, he is likely to be too tired to do anything. If a husband does achieve climax before his wife, he may still be able to assist her in reaching orgasm through other means than direct intercourse, ensuring that she is still satisfied.

I cannot stress enough the importance of foreplay. Aside from being a demand of good character, compassion, excellence and love for fulfilling the wife's needs, men who cuddle and kiss their wives, enjoy sensitive foreplay, and engage in flirting outside the bedroom will find their wives much more receptive to sexual relations, and find that they enjoy sexual intercourse more and reach orgasm more easily.

Foreplay can include many activities, including talking, kissing, massaging, touching, hugging, fondling, undressing, French kissing, petting, and so on. Don't mistake foreplay to mean groping the sexual parts of a woman. This can be most off-putting unless she is already feeling aroused. Groping is animalistic but caressing is what she needs. The entire body is there for the man to appreciate and caress. Do not forget that your wife has the same sexual rights over you! A classical writing called *The Perfumed Garden* gives a description of the process of bringing a woman to arousal:

If you would have pleasant coition, which ought to give an equal share of happiness to the couple and be satisfactory to both, you must first of all toy with the woman, excite her with kisses, by nibbling and sucking her lips, by caressing her neck and cheek. Turn her over in the bed, now on her back, now on her stomach, till you see by her eyes that the time for pleasure is near. . . . Then when you observe the lips of a woman tremble and get red, and

her eyes languish, and her sighs quicken, know that she is ready (Nafrāwī, *Al-Rawḍ al-Āṭir fī Nuzhat al-Khāṭir* (The Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delight)).

Only a loving, open relationship will let you know what your spouse needs. Desire and sexual satisfaction is a sensitive topic and spouses may feel shy, but over time they must learn to communicate deeply and honestly about their needs. If either is embarrassed, they will need to slowly open up. They should pay careful and close attention to each other, noticing how each responds and what gives them most pleasure and satisfaction. Couples may find that they argue but then having sexual intercourse helps to diffuse those arguments and remove ill feelings. Sexual intercourse connects couples as it releases oxytocin, sometimes called the hormone of love. They can discuss together any particular desires or fantasies they have, and it is fine to have some creativity within the bounds of permissibility. Allāh Almighty says in the Qur'an,

﴿نِسَاؤُكُمْ حَرْثٌ لَّكُمْ فَأَتُوا حَرْثَكُمْ أَنَّى شِئْتُمْ وَقَدِّمُوا لِأَنفُسِكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ مُلَاقُوهُ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

Your wives are a tilth for you, so come to your place of cultivation however you wish and put forth [righteousness] for yourselves. And fear Allāh and know that you will meet Him. And give good tidings to the believers (Baqara, 2:223).

The verse was revealed concerning a clan of the Anṣār who had been influenced by a Jewish clan in Madinah to believe that they could only make love to their wives in one position; this was with the woman on her side, as this was considered the most concealing position. The Jews believed that if she was penetrated from the back in the vagina, the child would be born cross-eyed. The Quraysh, on the other hand, used to lay down their women and make love to them in various positions, from the front, back, and on her back, but in the vagina. One of the emigrants married a woman from the Anṣār and tried to make love to her in the Qurayshī way but she refused. She

said if he wanted to make love to her, he would have to do it in the one way only. Their issue became known and eventually reached the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ. This is when Allāh revealed the verse above.¹

As stated in another narration, it means that a husband can approach his wife from the back or front as long as he avoids sodomy as well as vaginal intercourse during menses (*Tirmidhī*, 2980), which are both expressly forbidden. Thus, to keep up their pleasure and excitement, spouses can explore different sexual positions or make love at a different time of day or in another room in the house, ensuring privacy is maintained. They do not have to restrict themselves to the missionary position.

Many issues can have a negative impact on sexual satisfaction for women. The husband may be emotionally detached outside of the bedroom, the spouses may not be engaging in adequate foreplay, or the wife may have other issues affecting her self-esteem, such as depression, poor body image or prior abuse. If a wife is not sufficiently stimulated, sexual intercourse can be uncomfortable or even painful. Fatigue, illness and stress can also impede arousal, and scientific research suggests that the commonly held view that a woman's libido goes down after having children is in fact false. Female libido tends to go up, and a decreased desire for sexual intercourse may be indicative of other problems. It is sometimes the case that a woman may fake an orgasm during sexual intercourse out of embarrassment or guilt for not having found a way to achieve mutual satisfaction with her spouse. This is not healthy and the situation requires much care and consideration by both spouses to find a solution.

Another possible problem is if some men, through exposure to pornography, set up unrealistic physical expectations of their wives. Having seen surgically enhanced and airbrushed models, they are prone to being overly critical of their wives, who in turn feel inadequate and unattractive. A man should continuously compliment his

¹ The bulk of the details are contained in the narrations of *Abū Dāwūd* (2164), while the narrations of *Bukhārī* (4528) and *Muslim* (1435) are less detailed mentioning only the point about the child being born cross-eyed.

wife on her looks, telling her that she is lovely, that she is beautiful, that he is so happy to have her, that he is grateful to Allāh that he has her, and so forth. You have to flatter her. Giving her this morale boost will in turn help in the bedroom. When a woman does not feel attractive and confident, she will be reluctant to be vulnerable and to perform sexually.

Spouses must work together to address these issues in order to achieve a mutually satisfying sexual relationship. Men should familiarise themselves with the sexual needs of their wives and be successful in fulfilling them on a regular basis. Those with successful sexual relationships usually have a strong friendship with their spouse, one where there is mutual love, open communication and respect. The men who succeed in this are the ones who have taken the time to learn techniques not from pornography but from appropriate educational sources, and make their wives feel special and valued. This consistent affirmation allows wives to feel nurtured and sexually open for their husbands.

THE SEXUAL NEEDS OF MEN

Husbands have a deep need for sexual fulfilment. It is generally the case that men have a higher sex drive than women and have more need for visual stimulation. People who argue that men and women are exactly the same clearly ignore the fact that men's sexual attraction toward the beauty of women is routinely exploited by advertisers and by the beauty and fashion industries. Makeup, haircare products and perfumes are overwhelmingly marketed towards women. Men represent a huge percentage of consumers of pornography while many women may be averse to it. These facts should be taken into consideration when looking at the differing needs of the husband and wife when it comes to the sexual relationship.

Just as a wife should be given time, affection and adequate foreplay to help her achieve sexual satisfaction, the predominant sexual need of men is that their wives make a visual display of themselves

as a show of care to them. While men should also make an effort to make themselves clean and attractive for their wives, it is particularly in the nature of the female that she adorn herself, and men want their women to dress up and make a visual effort. Our society now is full of visual stimulation, from the internet, magazines, social media and television to advertisements plastered wherever you look and people themselves walking out in public dressed in what can barely be called clothes. This is a huge problem and a great temptation (*fitna*) for men, who are commanded to lower their gaze and to reserve their sexual fulfilment for their spouses. Women may sometimes be unaware of the extent of this challenge. A woman may see another woman who is stylishly dressed, who she believes to be very beautiful, and see her to be the main threat to keeping her man's attention. She may compare her to another woman who is very scantily dressed but who she feels has no style and is clearly baring too much, which she sees as off-putting and unattractive. But a male will more often find himself having to lower his gaze from the scantily dressed woman, as it is her nakedness and sexual allure that draw his attention, not how stylish or fashionable she appears to be. When men inevitably face such challenges, they must learn to control their urges and to satisfy them through the lawful avenue of their marital relations with their wives. We see such an example in the life of the Prophet ﷺ himself:

Jabir ibn 'Abdillāh ؓ reports that Allāh's Messenger ﷺ saw a woman, and so he came to [his wife] Zaynab and fulfilled his desire. He then came out and said, "The woman advances and retires in the form of Satan, so when one of you sees a woman who he finds attractive, he should go to his wife, for indeed she has what she has" (*Tirmidhī*, 1158).

Another version ends with "he should go to his wife, for that will relieve the desire he feels" (*Muslim*, 1403).

What an honest example we find in this narration! The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ knew the true nature and disposition of human beings. His example is pure guidance for all humanity. This ḥadīth indicates

that Satan uses the natural attraction that men have for women to beguile men and tempt them into doing the unlawful, not that the woman is Satan herself. This should not be misunderstood.

Wives should be sensitive to this struggle of men and make an effort on the visual front for their husbands. It is *ḥalāl* for a wife to wear revealing and alluring clothing at home in front of her spouse, whether that be shorts, high skirts, revealing dresses, or even lingerie and the like, though she should always maintain her dignity as a believing woman. It is difficult for a man to face such daily temptations and visual stimulation outside of the home, maybe even for several hours a day in his work place, and then come home to a wife who is not well kept and is dressed in scruffy clothes. A wife should realise that maintaining her physical appearance is a big part of her role in helping to satisfy the sexual needs of her spouse, just as she expects him to play his role in showing her affection and romantic gestures. The Prophet ﷺ was asked what kind of woman is best, to which he replied, "The one who makes him happy when he looks at her. . . ." (*Nasā'ī*, 3231). However, no Muslim man should base his ideas of female beauty and feminine allure on lewd magazines, or worse, on pornographic models, and expect from his wife the same undignified behaviour.

Some wives may at first be shy about dressing in a sexually alluring way or may lack confidence and openness in the bedroom. This is something that they should strive to learn and to apply, reading appropriate materials about intimacy and sexuality from an Islamic perspective (unfortunately, there is not enough of such material). When she is confident and comfortable in her own skin, her husband becomes more desirous of her and is fascinated by her. This is a key way to show your love for him and increase his longing and love for you. There is in fact a ḥadīth that mentions the praiseworthiness of such attributes: "The best of your women are the protective (*ʿafīfa*) and lustful (*ghalima*): protective of their chastity but sensuously desirous of their husbands" (Daylamī, *Al-Firdaws bi Ma'thūr al-Khiṭāb*, 2878).

PROBLEMS IN THE BEDROOM

A contentious issue that often arises when it comes to the sexual needs of the husband in Islam is refusal of intimacy. What if a wife does not want to be intimate even though this is the right of the husband in the marriage? A few ḥadīths deal with this subject. It is narrated from Abū Hurayra ؓ that the Prophet ﷺ said, "If a husband calls his wife to his bed and she refuses, and he then sleeps the night upset with her, the angels curse her until the morning" (*Bukhārī*, 3237; *Muslim*, 1436). Another narration mentions, "If a husband calls his wife for his need, she should oblige even if she is at the oven" (*Tirmidhī*, 1160).

These narrations paint a clear picture that a husband's need for sexual satisfaction carries a lot of weight. If the wife is not available to him, he may be drawn to fulfil his desires by an unlawful means, which is why the wife's availability is so strongly emphasised. The risk of food burning in the oven is not seen as serious as him seeking other means of relieving his desire. As we have mentioned, this sexual need is deeply ingrained in the psychology and physiology of men. But what if the wife does not like it? What if she is not in the mood? The simple answer to this would be that many times we don't feel like doing certain things, but they come with the job, position and the responsibilities we have in our lives. An employee may not really enjoy the rushed morning commute to work. A mother may feel she cannot be bothered to take the children to school. A student may not feel motivated to attend class. An *imām* may not be in the mood to lead the congregation in prayer and may want to pray alone. But these are things they must do in order to fulfil those particular roles. The worker drives to work, the mother does the school-run, the student goes to class, the *imām* leads the congregation, and they will find themselves much more satisfied if they accept that these actions are part of their responsibilities and do them happily and willingly, rather than with bitter reluctance. In fact, she may find that though she was not keen on the idea initially, she may in fact enjoy a very fulfilling sexual intercourse once they get going. Even if she did not

reach climax, she may feel satisfaction for having given her husband his right and, by this, earning the pleasure of Allāh.

The husband may have a higher sex drive than she does, or she may just not be in the mood for penetrative sex. However, she can still help him relieve his urge in other ways. An open relationship is important. Obliging her husband does not have to mean intercourse. There are lots of other ways to provide satisfaction. If she still persistently refuses, she is no doubt sinful according to the ḥadīth. Understand the needs of your husband and practice mercy; Allāh's mercy will envelope you and make your sacrifice pleasurable too. It will also help reduce discord at home. The woman has the upper hand in sexual intercourse so the ḥadīth encourages her to rise to the challenge. Of course, men must live up to their duties. The best man is the one who is best to his wife.

Notwithstanding this, the above ḥadīths do not give licence for the husband to abuse her. He should restrain himself from forcing himself upon her to achieve sexual fulfilment. Islamic law prohibits inflicting pain and injury on another. The ḥadīth depicts the husband spending the night upset, indicating that he restrains himself. Otherwise, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ would have advised him to gain his right in a forceful manner. The wife is obliged to obey her husband in his request unless she has a valid reason. If she is ill, fasting during the month of Ramaḍān, in her menses or post-natal bleeding, fears missing an obligatory prayer, exposure to others, physical harm or is just emotionally drained, she is not obliged to comply. The husband should show her consideration in this case and cannot use the above ḥadīth to justify aggression against her. Allāh Most High says, "On no soul does Allāh place a burden greater than it can bear" (Baqara, 2:286). Men may want to make love following a cuddle in bed. If she is not in the mood, he should simply understand and not be angry. If his lust is strong, he should tell her. Such open and honest communication should exist in a relationship.

We return once again to the importance of living the spirit of Islam, and not just laying down the law and trying to live our married lives through the lens of a *fiqh* manual. If a husband and wife

have a healthy relationship and the wife is sexually fulfilled, the husband should not be having a problem in getting her to engage. Occasionally it may be that she is feeling down, extremely tired or unwell, and the husband should be understanding at such times. But what if the wife is reluctant to engage intimately on a regular basis? This may be indicative of underlying problems. If it is the case that the wife simply cannot be bothered or feels she has something else she would rather do, she should consider that sometimes in life you need to do things you are not in the mood for. Marriage and the sexual aspect of the relationship in particular require a giving attitude, and you must both compromise and help each other. For either spouse to regularly refuse intimacy or to become more and more distant and uninterested in sex is a sign of problems for the relationship. Sex is sometimes the barometer of the state of the marriage. Couples in sexless marriages report feeling frustrated, unloved, undesirable, unattractive, and worst of all lonely. When one spouse pulls away and the other is left wanting, this is one step that Satan will utilise to draw a person into impermissible relations (more will be mentioned on this in chapter 9).

However, it may be the case that a newlywed wife is reluctant to engage sexually because of a deeper reason. She (or her husband for that matter) may be having difficulties with sexual intercourse because of previous experiences of sexual abuse or unwanted sexual advances. It makes one feel that sexual activity is dirty, or even that they themselves are dirty, and engaging intimately may trigger unpleasant memories. Some women suffer from vaginismus. This is a condition in which involuntary muscle spasms prevent vaginal penetration and can result in pain, even though they may be willing to engage in other forms of intimacy. Vaginismus can be brought on by several causes, including abuse or phobia. A number of treatments exist, such as gradual vaginal dilation, and the patient should seek help. Unfortunately, I have had to counsel couples with the above problems. Healing from sexual abuse can take a long time, and spouses should be patient and support one another in moving forward.

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tance toward intimacy is due to the fact that the husband is not fulfilling his role, whether that be in helping his wife achieve sexual satisfaction or generally in his behaviour as a spouse. Some wives refuse sex because they have accumulated years of emotional neglect. They have been left without adequate appreciation or support for the hard work they put in to run the household, manage their children, in-laws and clearing up the mess their husbands leave behind. There needs to be good relationship between the husband and wife outside of the bedroom for both to open up to the sexual relationship.

In the time of the Prophet ﷺ, people used to complain about a lack of intimacy because their spouses were worshipping too much. These days it is more likely to be a pornography or smartphone addiction, with someone checking their messages and different social media feeds last thing at night, first thing in the morning, and in between at every spare moment of the day. This sort of behaviour, whether by the husband or the wife, is extremely unhealthy. A man may also be lacking in gentleness or affection. If he is an aggressive type, it is most likely he will have problems in getting his wife to engage sexually. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "None of you should beat your wife as he would a slave, then make love to her at the end of the day" (*Bukhārī*, 5204). Some women refuse because they find their husbands too harsh, abrupt and unkind and have hardly thought about pleasuring their wife. They refuse because they are emotionally and physically drained. Unfortunately, *fatwās* or threats may not be enough to bring about a change to her attitude. The husband needs to learn a new language and then embark on creating a safe and secure space full of emotional, physical and spiritual tranquillity (*sakina*). Love and compassion are needed in such a situation.

If a man is not fulfilling his wife sexually, she may also feel that there is not much point in taking part. She is repeatedly taken some way toward being satisfied and is then left in the lurch, causing a great deal of emotional and physiological distress. It is acceptable to make love less frequently as long as, when you do, you take your time and make it special. For this you must take time out from the hustle and bustle of life. Not a quickie here and there while the

children are walking around, the mother-in-law is calling her name or a few minutes before you have to rush off to meet your friends. Nowadays, when men usually have only one wife (polygamy will be touched upon later), if he is not even able to satisfy her alone, then we have a big problem.

Having said all of this, there are often cases where the demand and neglect in intimacy cut the other way, where a man is reluctant or unable to perform and the wife is left wanting. Men may have problems with sexual performance for a number of reasons. There could be a physiological problem such as erectile dysfunction from cardiovascular disease, diabetes, in addition to low testosterone, stress, substance abuse, or alcohol consumption, or emotional issues such as unresolved conflict or even financial difficulties. All of these could contribute to stress and low sexual desire. You should communicate these issues with your spouse. If it is more serious, then having this conversation with a therapist or someone who can help may be quite difficult as it challenges your inner masculinity, but it is important to seek counselling and medical help. The sooner the better.

Clearly, a great many factors influence a couple's intimate relationship. Every person is unique, and each couple will therefore have their own unique journey together. For their marriage to succeed, it is of utmost importance that husband and wife also develop a healthy sex life, learning about the nature of desire, intimacy, and romance in Islam and about the unique needs of their spouse.



رَبِّهِ لِيُخَيِّرَ لِي خَيْرَ الْوَارِثِينَ

My Lord, do not leave me alone, though You are the best of heirs (Anbiyā', 21:89).

Chapter 8



THE WIDER FAMILY UNIT: CHILDREN AND IN-LAWS

A successful marriage turns on many factors, including finding an appropriate match, thorough preparation and working on one's communication skills. These largely concern the two individuals that are getting married. However, as we have already seen many times in the preceding chapters, a marriage is the union not only of the couple but ultimately of two families. Not only this, but we know that one of the objectives of marriage is to have children, thereby expanding the family unit. Thus, the couple will never really be two individuals in isolation. They will need to navigate their relationship in the context of a wider network of family ties from the very beginning. This requires much tact and a proactive approach to creating harmonious family ties.

IN-LAWS

There are many issues that need to be given consideration and thought when it comes to in-laws, whether it be living arrangements, avoiding tensions or negotiating appropriate interactions with extended family members. The main guiding principle for dealing with such matters is to uphold upright Islamic conduct (*adab*) in all of one's dealings with one's relatives. Each relationship, whether between a

parent and child, husband and wife, brother and sister, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, requires that certain etiquette be observed and certain rights upheld. We must also not reduce things to the bare bones of rights and duties while ignoring good conduct and a considerate attitude. Success in family life is all about striking a balance in the way one deals with all of one's family members as a whole.

When it is just a husband and wife living alone, there are only two people in the equation. Confusion can arise and more issues come to the fore when there are more people in the picture. For this, one needs to develop tact and skills in dealing with many people. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ emigrated from Makkah to Madinah. He and his followers, known as the *muhājirūn*, those who made *hijra* (emigration), were coming to the hometown of the *anṣār*, the helpers. At this time, the two main tribes in Madinah, the Aws and Khazraj, were involved in bitter disputes and fighting one another. With the arrival of the *muhājirūn*, the Prophet ﷺ facilitated ties of brotherhood between the newcomers and the locals. He then set about building the *masjid* and busied everyone in the communal needs of the society, such that all community members were involved in doing something productive, building and helping one another in the common good. Finally, he made a treaty with the Jews of Madinah to establish their rights as a minority community, proactively reaching out to create a stable society and avoid internal conflicts and problems. There are many lessons that can be derived from these examples, which are very relevant when it comes to the family setting. At the time of marriage, we see the joining together of two families, and specifically the moving of people to live with or close to new family members. When entering a new household, there is a crucial need to create harmony with one's in-laws. Winning them over can sometimes be difficult, but it is something that requires active effort and attention. Neglecting to forge strong ties and build harmony will inevitably lead to the opposite.

A beneficial way to go about this is to get occupied in doing something together. As we have discussed in earlier chapters on selecting a spouse, before marriage one should have thought about

the potential spouse, their family and their values. If both the husband and wife and their extended family have some common goals, it will be possible to get everyone involved in some common activities and projects. It is all too easy for each family member to become occupied with their own interests, their own activities and projects. The image of a family sitting together, each with their head down looking at their own smartphone or tablet, is unfortunately the reality for many people today. Try to be creative in finding ways to connect with your wider family. The family could come together to raise funds for a needy cause, assist in a local *masjid* or other project, organise a social family function with a religious talk and activities for the children, help out in a family wedding, funeral or other occasion, or help a relative with shopping or DIY work.

At the same time, care must be taken to ensure that appropriate gender interactions be maintained during this interaction. The Prophet ﷺ cautioned, "Beware of entering upon women." One of the Anṣār asked, "What do you say about the brother-in-law?" He ﷺ replied, "The brother-in-law is death!" (*Bukhārī*, 5232; *Muslim*, 2172). There is generally a lot of laxity in this and major problems can occur when there is too much informality among extended family members. For example, sitting to eat and informally chat with one's non-*maḥrams* is not appropriate. The laws of *ḥijāb* and of gender relations are not established because men and woman have no self-control and are drawn immediately into impermissible relations. Rather they are put in place because relaxed interactions can breed familiarity, and over time Satan works to plant unhealthy and unlawful thoughts and ideas. Attractions develop slowly over time, and can eventually spiral out of control. The risk of developing familiarity and a relaxed attitude is all the more severe with in-laws who live in close proximity and meet regularly. Thus, it is particularly important to establish appropriate limits and observe Islamic etiquette in gender interaction. These limits must be upheld by all, even those who don't personally feel any attraction.

A common issue that seems to arise is the friction that can occur between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The mother of the

groom and his new wife may well be completely fine by themselves, with their families and with their friends. Anyone who knows them individually may think of them as being decent people. But sometimes a strange chemistry arises when they are placed together. Of all relationships in family life this one is often the most tenuous. There are many possible reasons for this. Both have a strong tie to the man they share, their son or husband. After being the primary feminine love in his life, the mother may feel after the marriage that she has finally been replaced. One or both of them become very possessive of him and want his whole heart, and this is enough to create ill-feeling and suspicion. There often develops a weird form of jealousy or sense of betrayal that the other is trying to pull him away, whether that be the wife pulling away the mother's son, whom she has reared and lived with his entire life, while the wife feels the mother is pulling him back and preventing him living his own life, or interfering in the way that the daughter-in-law wishes to live or manage herself.

A husband must learn to manage this relationship with fairness and tact. He must exhibit excellent behaviour and conduct with both of them. He has a very critical yet delicate role to play. He should try to balance the relationship and mitigate any feeling of rivalry by making them both feel loved and special. He should not inform either of them of things that are prone to cause conflict between them. He should spend quality time with each of them alone as well as with both of them together. He should share positive comments that each of them may have made about the other to foster a mutual bond of love. He should encourage them to buy gifts for one another.

If problems arise, he must look to the rights that each of them is due and to uphold these whilst continuing to apply gentleness, patience and mercy with them both. The issues that arise could come from either side; however, more often than not it is his parents that seem to be the ones doing the oppressing. The wife is usually in a more vulnerable state, as she has left her familiar home and is living with a completely new family in a new home. This should not become akin to forcefully setting a new brick in an already built house. The new member should be slowly and gradually eased into

the new family. Therefore, the expectations of all parties should be made clear at the outset.

I know of a particular couple where the husband had an elderly mother and two disabled sisters. The wife moved in to live with them. She was clearly informed of the circumstances before the marriage but still agreed to marry him with an intention to serve his family as much as she could. She spent time in helping everyone out in the home. However, when she made any mistakes, as was inevitable, the mother-in-law would sometimes go for days without talking to her. The bride found this extremely difficult to deal with, as it is not easy to spend the bulk of the day with someone in the same house and not be on speaking terms. The husband noticed this and, being a prudent person, eventually moved his wife out into a different house close by. While this was not initially taken very well by his mother, over time she learned to respect his wife and now they have a wonderful relationship. Unfortunately, not all husbands are so considerate, nor do they all have the wherewithal to move in to and maintain a separate house, and nor are all parents willing to forgive and reconcile as his mother did.

Many families see it as a responsibility of the wife to serve her in-laws, and she is sometimes brought over to live with them for this reason. However, technically she has no obligation to serve her husband's parents, though if she chooses to do so this would be a great source of reward for her, increase her husband's love for her and help her to win his family over. A wife is entitled to a room, a kitchen and bathroom area independent of the interference of anyone else. This could be a flat within the parents' home, or a separate dwelling. Depriving a wife of her separate living quarters can be a source of great oppression upon her, and simply put, it is her right to have one.

One person I know who was dealing with a conflict between his mother and wife, ended up renting a separate house for his wife and children, and as his mother was a widow and all alone he would go and sleep at her house for a few days of the week and the remaining at his wife's house—yet his mother was still not happy! This is a big cultural problem that needs to be dealt with tactfully. At the

same time, sometimes a wife may aggressively push for her right to separate housing when her husband is in a difficult position of having sole responsibility to care for his elderly parents. We must remember that marriage is not just about selfishly demanding our rights. Spouses surely want each other to be happy and should strive to help each other. This requires compromise and love. Each couple will need to discuss the various issues involved to arrive at the best solution for their situation.

It is quite possible for a daughter-in-law to move in with her husband's family and for this to be a pleasant experience for everyone. It is also possible for a husband and wife to live separately at a distance from extended family while still maintaining strong family ties through visiting, exchanging gifts, building memories and getting involved in common family projects. At the same time, both types of living arrangements could also lead to problems. It all depends on the families and the individuals involved. If a woman living with her in-laws experiences a problem, she should consider whether this is a passing, one-off issue, in which case she should strive to be tolerant and show patience. However, if it is something long-term, she should not bottle things up or be expected to put up with oppression. This is not her duty. You should talk to your spouse about the problem at the earliest opportunity, in a gentle and tactful manner. Not doing so can build resentment and frustration, which could exacerbate the problem.

Just as the bride may help out with her husband's family, she may expect the same from her husband when he visits her family. He should not feel embarrassed or reluctant to perform acts of kindness toward her family. Recently, I was informed of a woman who became disillusioned with her husband after he refused to attend an appointment with her father. There was no one else available at the time, but he did not accompany his father-in-law because he said it was not his duty. The recommendation of Allāh's Messenger ﷺ was to even consider the welfare of his wife's loved ones, as he did with the family of Khadija after she had passed away.

Another negative cultural issue regarding in-laws is the percep-

tion held of the daughter-in-law's family and her visiting them. For instance, it is common in the village life of rural India that when a woman gets married and moves to live with her in-laws, she is now considered a part of her husband's family household. She is seen as their responsibility and it is a matter of pride that they provide for her. This is sometimes taken so far that it is even seen as dishonourable for her to go to visit her own family often, as it somehow implies that there is a problem with her new home. If she brings food from her family to her in-laws' house, nobody will partake of the food. This is an un-Islamic attitude and creates problems between the families. Collaboration between the families of the husband and the wife is required to create a healthy relationship. In our situation, it is still most common that a woman move to live closer to her husband's family, either living with in-laws or somewhere close by. Her movement and time spent visiting her own family should still be considered to be completely fine. What is bad about her seeing her family? The attitude that the in-laws have to prove that they can look after her, that she needs no one else and so is held on to as if she is their property, is ingrained in some cultures, and it needs to stop. This thought process needs to be demolished.

Of course, it would be inconsiderate of the new daughter-in-law to keep going back to her house as though she still lives there and does not care for her new family. She must make a serious effort to invest in her new relationships and adjust to her new life. Her relationship with her family will undoubtedly not be the same as it was before. However, she should still be allowed to visit her family at least once a week, unless they are specifically having a bad influence on her marriage. If they are far away, this may be difficult, but everyone makes certain degrees of sacrifice in marriage, and a wife should still feel that her family is respected. It is normal that she miss them and want to maintain ties with them, even if not to the same extent as before. Particularly when it is early in the marriage and she typically does not yet have the responsibilities of children, she could visit her family often such that she comfortably transitions into her new life.

These are just a few of the many issues that can arise with regard to in-laws. It is important for both the husband and wife to remember the importance of building the strength of their relationship. You should not let external influences, whether in-laws, parents or even friends, take you away from your spouse. Friends can also have a particularly negative impact if you are more of a follower and are easily influenced, as they take you away from family obligations. It is normal for your relationship with your friends to change once you are married. Your marriage should not cut you off from your friends, but your spouse should be added as your closest friend.

In-laws and parents can also be a source of support and advice if a couple are facing internal marriage problems. However, a couple should always try to sort things out between themselves before consulting other parties. Some mothers end up aggravating matters and causing irreversible damage. They sometimes function as a destructive remote control for their daughter's marriage. There was a case of a daughter who would have problems with her husband and would often consult her mother for advice. The mother would regularly advise her and take her side in any issue. One day, she stunned her daughter by asking her to no longer bring to her the issues with her husband. She told her, "You are the one who has the relationship with him, not me. You know your husband more intimately than anyone else does. You love him the way you do. Your love can help you easily overcome his problems and forgive him. I do not love him the way you do and it is far easier for me to pick a grudge and harbour it against him. I am the wrong person to give advice to you. I will always see things in a biased way from your perspective. All I see is the negative side of things and this affects the perception I have of him. This simply is not fair. You cannot do that to him. You need to take control of this as *you* are the best person for this." When the mother stepped back and the daughter stopped being over-reliant on her, she found she could deal with things better and ended up having fewer issues with her husband as a result, and they started

getting along well. May God bless this mother, for she was guided to do the right thing and empower her daughter to take charge.

CHILDREN

Some time into the marriage, a couple may be blessed with children. The topic of parenting is in itself an entirely different subject to that of marriage and deserves its own dedicated books, courses and study. However, the arrival of children significantly affects a marriage, and the strength of the marital relationship is also very important when it comes to the raising of children.

The Qur'an contains the following supplication:

﴿رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا﴾

Our Lord, grant us spouses and progeny who will be the joy of our eyes, and make us good examples for the righteous (Furqān, 25:74).

This Qur'ānic *du'ā'* is very comprehensive, a *du'ā'* of a prophet, and it tells us a number of things. In it we call upon our Lord, our *Rabb*, the Almighty Nurturer (*murabbi*), who raises all things stage by stage, rearing them and taking care of them at each crucial stage until they reach their full potential. We ask Him to give us from our spouses and from our descendants coolness of sight, delight and satisfaction. By this we mean that we are pleased by them not only in their physical beauty but in the happiness that comes in thinking of their achievements, their *akhlāq* and the joy they bring to life. The term *dhurriyya* applies to all of our descendants until the last day of this world, our entire progeny, and that is a potentially very long line of people. We then ask our Lord to accept our spouses, children, further descendants and family to become leaders and role models of the best people of this umma, people who uphold the religion and are mindful of their Lord. When we make such a *du'ā'*, we are among those whom Allāh has divinely enabled (*tawfiq*) to make such a *du'ā'*. If we wish to see it come to fruition, we need to

These are just a few of the many issues that can arise with regard to in-laws. It is important for both the husband and wife to remember the importance of building the strength of their relationship. You should not let external influences, whether in-laws, parents or even friends, take you away from your spouse. Friends can also have a particularly negative impact if you are more of a follower and are easily influenced, as they take you away from family obligations. It is normal for your relationship with your friends to change once you are married. Your marriage should not cut you off from your friends, but your spouse should be added as your closest friend.

In-laws and parents can also be a source of support and advice if a couple are facing internal marriage problems. However, a couple should always try to sort things out between themselves before consulting other parties. Some mothers end up aggravating matters and causing irreversible damage. They sometimes function as a destructive remote control for their daughter's marriage. There was a case of a daughter who would have problems with her husband and would often consult her mother for advice. The mother would regularly advise her and take her side in any issue. One day, she stunned her daughter by asking her to no longer bring to her the issues with her husband. She told her, "You are the one who has the relationship with him, not me. You know your husband more intimately than anyone else does. You love him the way you do. Your love can help you easily overcome his problems and forgive him. I do not love him the way you do and it is far easier for me to pick a grudge and harbour it against him. I am the wrong person to give advice to you. I will always see things in a biased way from your perspective. All I see is the negative side of things and this affects the perception I have of him. This simply is not fair. You cannot do that to him. You need to take control of this as *you* are the best person for this." When the mother stepped back and the daughter stopped being over-reliant on her, she found she could deal with things better and ended up having fewer issues with her husband as a result, and they started

getting along well. May God bless this mother, for she was guided to do the right thing and empower her daughter to take charge.

CHILDREN

Some time into the marriage, a couple may be blessed with children. The topic of parenting is in itself an entirely different subject to that of marriage and deserves its own dedicated books, courses and study. However, the arrival of children significantly affects a marriage, and the strength of the marital relationship is also very important when it comes to the raising of children.

The Qur'an contains the following supplication:

﴿رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا﴾

Our Lord, grant us spouses and progeny who will be the joy of our eyes, and make us good examples for the righteous (Furqān, 25:74).

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take practical steps to make it a reality. This is a very comprehensive supplication for our children and all of their descendants and it is one that should be memorised and recited often. Fortunate is he for whom this *du'ā'* is accepted.

As for practically establishing the moral rectitude and both worldly and religious success of our families and our children in particular, this requires active effort on our part. Parenting can be very challenging and the arrival of children can test even the strongest of marriages. For some, children may arrive very early in the marriage, before a couple have even had much time to strengthen the foundations of their relationship. Husbands and wives must thus make sure that they are on the same wavelength when it comes to raising children and issues of discipline, and that they take time to prepare adequately, together, on their parenting skills, and developing a united approach on the way they wish to raise their children. Success in parenting requires that they show a united front to children. If one of the parents is too permissive this can lead to negative consequences, not only for the children but on the marital relationship. The other parent may feel undermined and disrespected.

Once, when I was on a trip, I joked with a friend I was travelling with, telling him that he should call his wife. He replied, "No, it's not my wife I should call, I miss my children." I felt extremely sorry for him, if his reply was indeed genuine. Are there people whose relationship with their wives is such that they just carry their babies? A husband and wife should invest more time in each other than they do in their children. As we are told in the Qur'an:

﴿هُنَّ لِيَاسُ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِيَاسُ لَهُنَّ﴾

They are [close] as garments to you, as you are to them (Baqara, 2:187).

The spouses are described as garments for each other and share a unique relationship. The same sort of discussion is not there for the parent-child relationship, which is about nurturing and *tarbiya*. More investment should be made between spouses as they are the heads of the household, the main pillars of the family. A healthy relationship

between them will flow to the children. Children are very sensitive in this and can very easily pick up on issues between their parents.

The husband and wife need to actively make time for each other to invest in their relationship. For a woman especially, who most often bears the main responsibilities of childcare, the emotional investment she makes as a mother in her children can be quite overwhelming. She should ensure that she continue to prioritise her relationship with her husband and, importantly, continue to make herself available for intimacy. This can be difficult. Taking care of young children can be extremely exhausting. A woman may also have lost some level of self-confidence after the physical challenges of pregnancy and the changes her body has undergone. She should try her best to manage all of her new responsibilities and to take whatever steps she needs in order to regain her confidence.

Some women don't understand that for men it is not as easy to bond with their children straightaway. Remember that as a woman your connection with your child comes naturally because you literally carried the baby in your womb for nine months. You have a physical and emotional head start of about nine months to your husband. Give him time.

A husband should be understanding of the changes his wife undergoes as she transitions into motherhood. Your wife is no longer just your wife, she is also a mother and you must learn to share her attention. Many women are overwhelmed after giving birth regardless of how many children they have had. It is a huge change and, although they may not generally admit it, it can be a traumatic experience. Her love for the child does not magically remove the emotional, mental and physical stress she has to go through. Be kind to her and help her in every way you can. You may work all day, but she is in a state where her body is recovering, bleeding and producing milk for the baby. She is also feeding the baby, which is in itself a challenge. She may also still be taking care of the household. Take care of some of the household chores for a while if there is no one else present to help. You will reap the rewards later.

A husband can induce problems and create distance between

himself and his wife after the arrival of children if he does not show enough attention, interest or give enough time to his wife and children. Your children are a shared responsibility, and even if your wife takes on the lion's share of childcare responsibilities, you still need to be an active parent. Husbands should proactively offer to take care of the children at times so that a wife can get some respite or have some time to go and do something, anything, productive that is solely for herself. Many wives and mothers of young children complain that they often cannot go to Islamic events or attend classes because they are always stuck with the children. Giving her such opportunities helps her to become a better person, to learn more about her religion and to be a happier, more well-rounded person. A husband cannot be the only source of advice for his spouse and it is important for her to also have external teachers. Women can play a vital role in building our Muslim communities so long as the cultural and social constructs we have built do not prevent them from doing so. Husbands should not only be supportive in words but should also be prepared to roll up their sleeves and take care of the children at times to facilitate this. You may not realise the impact of it, but even having a few hours of protected time a week to get on with her own things can be a massive benefit to your wife when she is a busy mother to young children.

Steps to Having Pious Children

While the topic of nurturing children and bringing them up to be good humans requires an entire book, I would like to briefly mention some general advice here regarding the major milestones on this path. Some of this will be more pertinent to mothers than to fathers purely by virtue of how Allāh has created women. Preparation for having good children can start well in advance of their embryonic conception. You can start praying for righteous progeny even well before marriage. Choosing the right spouse has been emphasised above in great detail, among which the characteristic of piety cannot be stressed enough as being perhaps the single most important factor for bringing up good children.

Observe all the *sunnas* while getting married and avoid anything reprehensible before, during and after the ceremony. This is the initial stage of your parenthood and a new phase in your life. If you build it on a sound and praiseworthy foundation, you can expect to reap many of its sweet fruits later. Good children need the right interaction between their parents. Enhance your character and your interpersonal communication and relationship. Ensure that you recite all the supplications for protection from Satan, especially during sexual intercourse when you are trying to conceive. During pregnancy, while carrying the embryo, you need to be very careful about what you eat, read and watch. You should spend a lot of time engaged in the recitation of the Qur'ān and the remembrance of Allāh and supplication to Him. All of these are considered factors of positive influence upon the little one snuggled comfortably in your womb.

When your child emerges into this world it cries. Crying is medically considered a healthy and positive sign indicating that its lungs are functioning properly. However, the reason for its crying could also be having to leave its pure and protected divine realm and entering this strange abode of strife and temptation. Hence, the first word to welcome your child with is the beautiful and comforting name of Allāh through the *adhān* (call for prayer) in the right ear and the *iqāma* (call to commence) in the left. You can undertake this if your husband is not present and you have the energy to do so. Otherwise, make alternative arrangements. Some hospital wards or delivery rooms may have music playing in the background. The nurses can be requested to kindly turn it off in advance. This is a very special moment for you and your little one and you want to be well prepared for its arrival and what exposure it receives. You can play some Qur'ān during different times of the day for baby to listen to. We did this with our children.

It has been related that the pious mothers of many great people would engage in remembrance of Allāh especially while nursing them. You can have a special litany to recite at this time. Some *tasbīḥ* (*subḥān Allāh*), *taḥmīd* (*al-ḥamdu li'Llāh*), *takbīr* (*Allāhu akbar*), *ṣalawāt* on the Prophet ﷺ, or even a comprehensive collection of Qur'ānic and

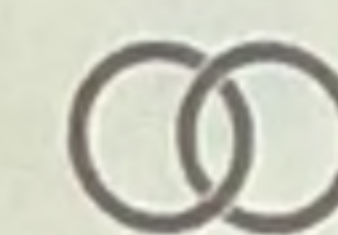
prophetic supplications, such as *Al-Hizb al-A'zam* (The Supreme Daily Remembrance), make an excellent accompaniment to this important act of motherhood. This is not the time to sit and watch box sets, dramas or soaps or be engaged in other useless or harmful pastimes. Your emotions and feelings transfer to your child. You want your child to grow up and be a God-fearing and productive human being.

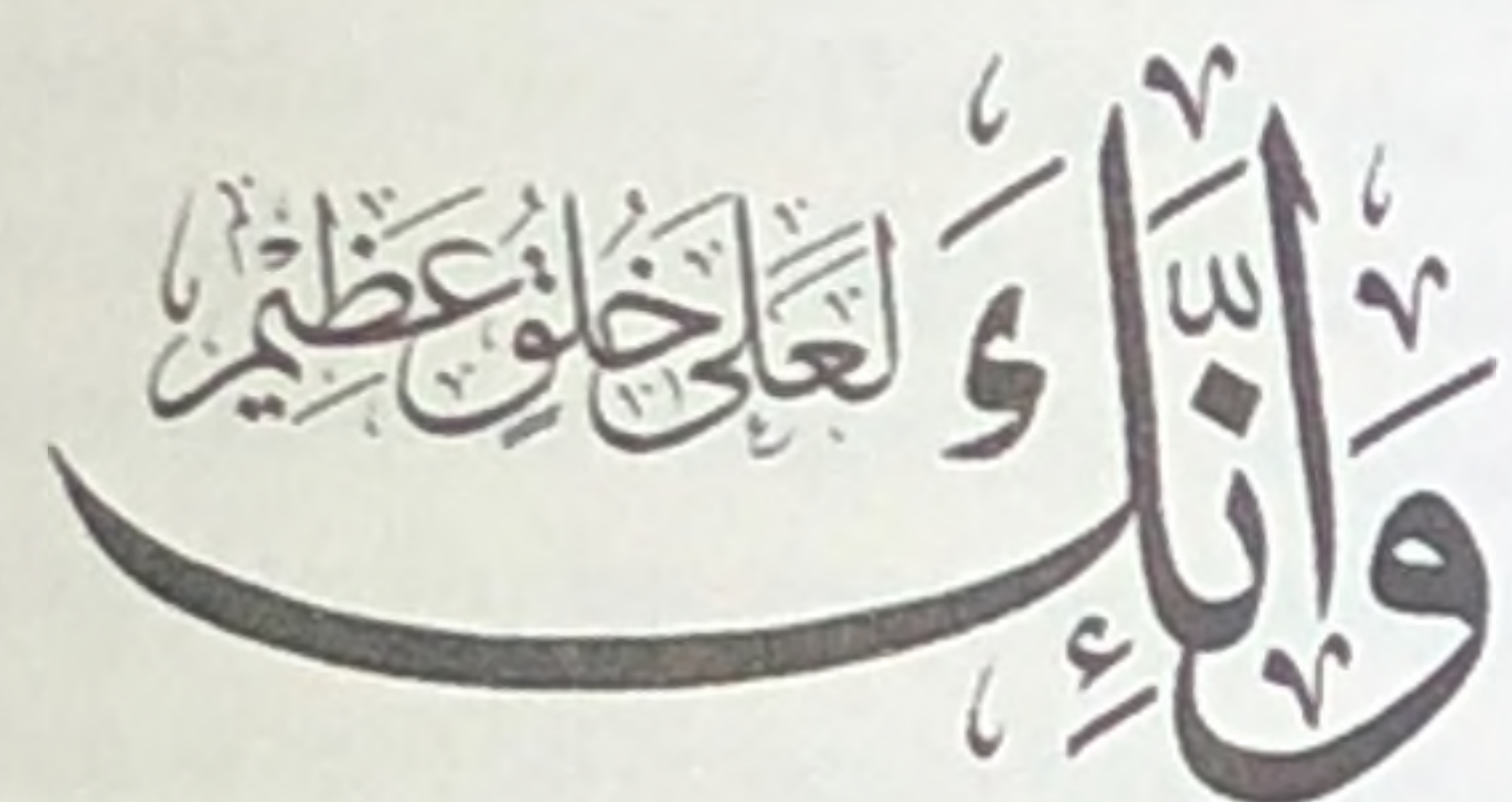
Consider all of this sacrifice to be your perpetual charity. Any good deed you inculcate in your child and they grow up doing it, you will have an equal share in it. The lap of the mother is truly the child's first *madrassa*, and you are well placed to take advantage of this, sometimes even more than the father. The Prophet ﷺ considered the righteous child who prays for his parents to be a source of continual charity for them even after the parents have departed this world. So your efforts in this regard are not in vain.

Should the Father Be Present During Childbirth?

Traditionally in many societies it appears that husbands did not attend the childbirth. Rather the womenfolk did, generally the mother or mother-in-law along with the midwife. The more recent practice in the West has been for husbands to be present. Some of the advantages cited for this is that it helps the husband to appreciate what his wife has to go through for him and his child, induces empathy for her, encourages him to take care of her as she recovers and allows him to bond with the baby from the get-go. The disadvantages cited are that it could be very intimidating and could create revulsion in him and become an obstacle to enjoying intimacy with his wife later. For some it can even lead to PTSD (a simple online search should bring up several reports on this). Especially in the case of traumatic births, where the mother and baby are often at risk and the father may witness significant loss of blood or attempts to resuscitate mother or baby, he can feel completely out of control and unable to assist. This experience can be very alienating for him. In one family we know, the husband fainted during the process, and his wife now refuses to have him attend, as she would be more worried

about him than about herself. Hence, if someone wants to attend to support their wife, it is permissible and could be very comforting and reassuring to the wife, especially if she does not have anyone else like her mother or sister present. But a wife should not be upset if the husband is unable to be present, as there is no direct religious recommendation in this regard or he may just not think he can handle it.





For you are truly of a sublime character
(Al-Qalam, 68:4).

Chapter 9



DEALING WITH MARITAL PROBLEMS

In life you will inevitably have to deal with problems. There is no perfection to be found in the world, and part of the test for us as human beings is how we decide to deal with the problems we face. Many issues in our community in general are the result of troubled homes, which in turn lead to troubled communities and societies. The home should be a *maskan*, a place in which all family members find *sukūn* (tranquillity). Children who are brought up in troubled homes end up carrying these troubles with them throughout their adult lives, perpetuating these issues in their own families when they become parents, and going on for many generations, which gives rise to the problems and numerous social ills that we see in our society.

Much of the tranquillity of the home and the stability of the family rests on the relationship between the husband and wife. Problems that arise in this relationship can be between the spouses themselves or due to some external issue. If a couple have a strong relationship, external threats to the marriage and to the family can more easily be overcome. Problems within the marriage can have more lasting negative impacts. Regarding these internal problems, couples will have to find solutions and seek advice for their specific situation and unique challenges. Human lives are complex, and each couple will have their own story and struggles. However, from my experience there are certain recurring problems that are worth exploring in

more detail here, with a view to providing some general guidance to couples facing specific issues. These can be summarised into six areas:

- Communication
- Money matters
- Intimacy
- Infidelity
- Domestic violence
- Anger (discussed at length in the next chapter on divorce).

COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

It is not an exaggeration to say that most of the problems that arise between spouses when it comes to disagreements, can be overcome if they were to work on their communication skills. A man and woman should have married on the basis of a certain level of compatibility, such that any differences and disagreements that arise should be surmountable with effective communication and compromise.

By and large, most arguments occur as a result of miscommunication and frustrations arising over seemingly little things. In some consultations a couple seem to be in a terrible state in their relationship. I am then amazed to find that as I begin delving into the issues, each spouse starts pouring out a barrage of small and seemingly insignificant things. How could it be that a couple is having such major problems over these trivial matters? What I find then is that often these smaller issues mask some bigger underlying problem. The larger problems magnify these small issues and cause them to become more significant. Satan will also do his best to get into the middle of such situations to stir, prod and poke and exaggerate the problems a person notices in their spouse. Rather than constantly putting out small fires, the couple need to sit down and tackle their source, that is, to deal with their underlying issues. This requires sensible reflection and open communication.

Underlying problems may sometimes lie dormant for a number of years, and suddenly one may find their spouse, after many years

of a seemingly happy marriage, starting to act up. Whether it is becoming more irritable, less interested in family life, more angry and using bad language, or being more tearful, there are many surface changes one may notice, and they could be indicative of any number of deeper problems. It could be problems developing at work, in the wider family unit, a woman's changing patterns of hormones, an emerging addiction or general lack of fulfilment in some way. The surface issues that may arise at rocky times are ones that a spouse should learn to overlook and to approach with an attitude of compassion, thinking about how they can help their partner in tackling the underlying problem. If throughout marriage you have both made efforts to build up the "love bank," then when rocky times come it is much easier to have *ḥusn al-ẓann*, thinking well of the other person and making excuses for their difficult behaviour. If you are convinced that you can work through your problems, then *inshā Allāh* you will. There is a saying that if you believe you can, or you believe you can't, you are right. The same goes for working on one's marriage. The day you think "I don't need this," you will not have the willpower for it to work, which can lead down the slippery slope toward divorce.

In the day to day, there needs to be constructive, mutual criticism done with *akhlāq* and tact. Just because your parents did things in a particular way does not mean things will work in the same way for you and your spouse. You are an individual unit and you have to take your spouse for who they are. This requires an acceptance of their different mode of being and thinking. Men and women have many differences, and you should realise that this will affect the way you speak to them or criticise them. Generally speaking, women tend to be more brittle and sensitive. This helps them to be more compassionate and empathetic, and thus can help them in their journey of coming closer to Allāh. An Israelite tradition has it that Mūsā عليه السلام asked Allāh, "Where can I find You?" He replied, "I am with those whose hearts are broken for My sake,"¹

At the same time, men tend to be more independent and detached

¹ Ibn Qayyim, *Madārij al-Sālikin*, 1:306, 379; Sakhāwī, *Al-Maqāsid al-Ḥasana*, 169.

and have a deep need for respect. Thus, for both men and women, degrading criticism will never work. When you need to criticise your spouse, always start nicely, with a kiss, with praise for something else that you are happy about. Criticism should show at the same time that you as a husband still adore and love your wife, and that you as a wife still respect and love your husband. If you have true love and good character in dealing with your spouse, you will have enough brownie points stored up in your marriage account when dealing with them. Constant negativity and criticism will lead to a spouse feeling that they have no positive aspects of the relationship to fall back on, which can lead to low self-esteem or bitterness, frustration and resentment. You should both show sincerity in aiming for mutual enhancement and improvement.

When you do try to enjoin good and forbid evil when dealing with your spouse, this should be done privately without making a scene in front of other people. It is mentioned in a ḥadīth that a bedouin man came and started urinating in the Prophet's Mosque ﷺ. Some of the companions were outraged, but the Prophet ﷺ ordered them to let him finish and afterwards told him politely that this was not appropriate (*Bukhārī*, 6128; *Muslim*, 285). He knew that interrupting the man during the action could have caused more harm than good. Similarly, sometimes it will be necessary for you to let something go and tell your spouse your feelings about it afterwards, as it can be harmful to mention it at the time. With children around it could cause them distress and maybe even force them to take sides. In all matters, gentleness and good communication are very important.

Even if you try your best to deal with each other with the best character, you will still inevitably fall into an argument at some point. We are human beings with emotions and egos that need to be tamed. We tend to escalate problems, get angry and can at times stop talking to each other. A small issue can become a huge mountain, but you should both try as soon as possible to come back down and to put the issue to rest.

When a disagreement arises between two Muslims, they are given a maximum of three days to reconcile. There is a great wisdom in

this, as after this amount of time you may become comfortable in your separation and hearts can harden, making it more difficult to reconcile. As for the spouses, because of the intimacy and importance of this relationship, a husband and wife should avoid even a single night passing while they are still angry with each other about an issue. Each should remember that they will not lose when they apologise. Each should strive to focus on the positive and be the one who makes the positive change. Forgiving is an essential aspect of the Sunna. Sometimes things can get bad, with spouses sleeping in separate beds and needing to give some space to each other. This should not be allowed to go on for a long time and they need to address the underlying issues causing the tension. If you leave them for too long it fosters resentment and can lead to irreconcilable differences and potentially divorce.

The spouses may in many ways be training one another in their relationship—a husband in helping his wife to manage her emotions, a wife in helping her husband to be a full man in showing appropriate manliness combined with affection and gentleness. A time may come when a woman will suddenly start crying and get extremely emotional about something, completely bewildering her husband. Two days later her menses begin. PMT, or pre-menstrual tension (also known as PMS, or pre-menstrual syndrome), has a potentially strong effect on a woman's emotions and moods, and it should be discussed and understood between the spouses. Women may go through various emotional issues over the course of their lives with the hormonal changes due to their monthly cycles or changes in pregnancy (one in ten women suffer from post-natal depression) and menopause. Sometimes this may be influenced by vitamin deficiencies or other diet and health issues, which should be looked into. Husbands must be aware of these different aspects and act with patience and understanding. They should remember the words of Allāh's Messenger ﷺ, cited above, advising men to treat women well despite her perceived "crookedness." He should be aware of the times that she tends to be particularly sensitive and snappy and perceptive of what is out of the norm.

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The husband also needs to step up and act with confidence, maturity and a healthy sense of authority and leadership in the marriage. Sometimes a wife may act very independently while the husband is too soft, and while the wife may be getting her own way in everything, she will not really be happy as this is against the natural structure of the marital relationship. Most women desire a fair and just authority figure and will appreciate seeing their husbands assuming this role. I have seen many unhappy marriages where this structure is not in place: the husband is unable to be the man of the house, and the wife is constantly unhappy despite getting her way in everything. This does not mean that a man should put his foot down at every turn and simply impose his will without concern for what his wife thinks or wants. We discussed earlier that it is part of the Sunna to consult one's wife on important matters. What I mean here is that women often look to their husbands to step up and be decisive when the situation calls for it.

When 'Umar ؓ was caliph and Leader of the Faithful, a person decided to go and complain to him about his wife and her overbearing character. When he reached the caliph's house, he stood for a moment waiting at the door. He heard the caliph's wife shouting from within but did not hear 'Umar ؓ respond. Realising that the same thing was happening even in the house of the Leader of the Faithful, the man turned back dejected. When 'Umar ؓ emerged to open the door and saw him departing, he called to him and asked why he had come. He explained, "O Leader of the Faithful, I had come to complain about my wife's domineering character, but when I heard your wife doing the same, I turned back thinking that, if this is the state of the Leader of the Faithful with his wife, then what about me!" To this 'Umar ؓ responded, "My brother, if I bear this it is because she has rights over me. She cooks my food, bakes my bread, washes my clothes, nurses my children, and none of these are mandatory on her. My heart also finds contentment with her away from the unlawful, so this is why I bear all of this." To this the man responded, "My wife is the same," and so 'Umar ؓ advised

him, "Then bear her patiently, my brother, for indeed it is only for a short while!"

This account brings to light the reality of married life, in that disagreements and arguments are normal. This incident does not give women licence to mistreat their husbands. Some marital discord is normal, but at the same time we should not try to push the boundaries all the time without having built up the positive balance in our marriage love bank.

If a husband and wife do find themselves faced with irreconcilable differences that they are unable to overcome even through counselling and external help, divorce is an option as a last resort. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

MONEY PROBLEMS

A couple may find that finances are a cause of difficulties in their relationship at one time or another. This could be due to various factors:

- the household income may be limited,
- one or both of the spouses may be spending irresponsibly,
- the husband may be stingy in providing money for his wife,
- the wife maybe too demanding,
- money may be being used as a tool of coercion or abuse.

The details of the rights due to each spouse are useful to be aware of in situations such as these. It is the obligation of the husband to provide financially for his wife and children, while the wife is not held responsible for the finances of the family. The husband must provide the wife a stipend (*nafaqa*) for decent quality clothing, a decent place to live, food and some money to spend. The latter should

¹ Dhahabī, *Al-Kabā'ir*, 179. According to the version of this incident in Samarqandi's *Tanbih al-Ghāfilin*, this wife of 'Umar ؓ was Umm Kulthūm, the daughter of 'Alī and Fāṭima ؓ and thus the Prophet's ؐ granddaughter. She was many years younger than 'Umar ؓ but he bore her feistiness with patience.

be a set stipend that is completely hers to do with as she wishes and that she does not need to be held accountable for. This will provide an opportunity for her to give *sadaqa* or to buy a certain item she wants, or so that she can save for something else using the stipend she is given, if she does not have her own separate income.

Some husbands can be very stingy, sometimes not even providing enough for a wife to buy the groceries for the household. Many men give money only for the household expenses. Being so strict that she has to ask for every single purchase is not healthy for the relationship of the couple. At the same time, giving the wife complete freedom to spend as much as she pleases and then finding one's bank account rinsed out is also not a sensible approach. There needs to be a balance between these two extremes. Importantly, a husband should not assume that his wife will spend irresponsibly. Their relationship needs to be built upon trust, and if he constantly treats her as if he does not trust her, this sends a very negative message and could have repercussions in other aspects of the marriage.

At the same time, wives should not be too demanding and should make sure that they are spending within the means of the family. A woman who is frugal and manages the expenses of her household with care and wisdom will find she has a grateful husband and greater smoothness and stability in their financial affairs. She should remember that because her husband has the burden and responsibility of providing financially, this also means that it is his call, at the end of the day, to decide how his money is spent. The final say in financial decisions falls to him, and he may not always be able to meet her requests for certain purchases. He may also need to think about savings and planning for the future.

If a wife has her own wealth (as is now more commonly the case), these are hers alone to spend or save as she pleases. A husband has no right to ask her to use these earnings for the needs of the family. If she chooses to do this, it is completely up to her. Both should remember that their relationship in general, including how they deal with their finances, should be based on an attitude of care, compromise and fairness. Importantly, if both spouses contribute

to any aspect of joint family assets, their ownership and shares of particular things needs to be kept track of.

If one of the spouses is spending more than they ought to, this should be discussed with gentleness and tact. Women should avoid micromanaging a husband's spending; his money is his to do with as he wishes, provided he is giving you the rights due to you. A wife's criticism and undermining her husband makes him feel that she thinks he is incompetent. If he buys an item that you think is unnecessary, it may well be that he thinks the same of something you want to buy. He may see buying you flowers to be a pointless waste of money, even though you justify this as a kind gesture. Unless he is driving the family to financial ruin, leave him be. Respect his choices in money management and he is more likely to be doting and to spend on you in the things you want. Admiration and respect are critical to a man.

If either spouse is using finances as a means to control the other, if there is abuse, coercion, or extreme stinginess, this is when a couple need to get professional counselling or seek help from a trusted elder or local scholar. A woman who is in an oppressive situation should learn and understand her rights and seek help when she needs it.

Even when both spouses are open and fair in financial matters, money in general can become a problem and cause for tension. When a husband and wife are having trouble making ends meet, their stress can cause other issues to become magnified. They may find themselves having petty arguments about seemingly unrelated things, while the underlying issue is that either or both of them are worried about finances. We must remember that ultimately *rizq*, sustenance, comes from Allāh Almighty. The sustenance and means you have today and what you will have tomorrow and the effort you will put into it has already been written. It may be that one day you have many thousands in the bank account or investment portfolio, but a financial crash causes it all to be taken away in an instant.

When money never seems to be enough for the needs of the family, this is a sign of a lack of *baraka* in one's wealth. There are many things one can do to remedy this. The husband and wife should strive

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to ensure that all of their sustenance is coming from *ḥalāl* earnings, that they are avoiding *ribā* (usury) and are giving both the obligatory *zakāt* as well as additional voluntary *ṣadaqa*. Allāh Most High tells us that when we give in charity and as gifts to friends and family, when we are generous and open-handed, He will not deprive us, but rather increase us in *rizq* and in rewards in the hereafter. In fact, one of the best tried and tested side businesses, as it were, that a person can undertake for blessings in their wealth is to give regular charity. Set up a monthly direct debit from your bank account to one or more good causes, even of a small amount. Allāh says, "Who is he that will loan to Allāh a beautiful loan, which Allāh will double unto his credit and multiply many times? It is Allāh who withholds and who gives abundantly, and to Him shall be your return" (Baqara, 2:245). I have personally found this to be absolutely true. A person should strive to work and earn with *iḥsān*, excellence, avoid wasteful extravagance and show gratitude to Allāh for all that He has provided, for he tells us in the Qur'an:

﴿لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ﴾

If you give thanks, I will increase for you (Ibrāhīm, 14:7).

As a couple you should have open communication about financial matters so that you are able to successfully tackle them together. When you are strong and united, *inshā Allāh*, any storms you face will not negatively affect other aspects of your marriage; rather, they will allow you to grow together and become even stronger as a couple.

PROBLEMS IN SEXUAL INTIMACY

Sexual intimacy in general and some of the possible issues that can arise have been discussed in detail in chapter 6. Most often these problems arise when either spouse is feeling that their needs are not being met. Developing one's understanding of the different needs of men and women and learning to communicate openly with your

spouse about your desires and needs should help. Both husband and wife need to address the needs of the other with love and sensitivity.

A specific issue that must be tackled head on is pornography. Pornography is one of the plagues of our times. It is a real problem affecting the entire population at large, and the Muslim community is not immune to it. It is, by and large, an issue for men, who as we have seen are more visual and for whom it is mostly designed and marketed. However, women can also be affected by porn addiction. Previously it was "lads' mags," while now with the explosion in digital technology, everyone has the ability to access pornographic material for free. This is a crisis and destruction of our age. It spares very few.

Pornography is completely abhorrent and impermissible. From an Islamic perspective, it is clearly shameful and grotesque to exhibit or to watch sexually explicit material. Even for non-Muslims, more and more people are undertaking research and writing about the harms of pornography. These include that

- it sets unrealistic expectations of sex and results in lack of sexual fulfilment in normal sexual encounters;
- it creates unrealistic beauty standards, leaving spouses insecure about their appearance;
- it is addictive, with a progressing need for the user to access more and more extreme material to find satisfaction. Porn users may find themselves veering towards homosexual porn, bestiality or even paedophilia because of the downward slide of addiction, even though they would previously not at all have been inclined that way and would have found it grotesque;
- it can cause erectile dysfunction due to excessive masturbation;
- it can lead to depression in both the user, who feels unable to tackle the addiction, and in their spouse, who feels betrayed and unable to do anything about it;
- it could normalise rape and abuse, as many sexual predators and rapists develop an addiction to pornography before turning to more transgressive forms of sexual depravity.

These are just a few examples of the harms of pornography, and

they should be worrying enough. For young people who are not yet married, avoiding pornography can be a huge challenge. But it is a necessary one, and it is imperative that someone struggling with it work to wean themselves off of it as soon as possible. One should seek counselling if need be, and there are some very helpful online resources both from Muslims and non-Muslims.

Some mistakenly believe that it is not a big deal or that they have this problem because they are single, and so they allow themselves to continue, expecting to stop once they get married. To put it simply, marriage is not a solution to a porn addiction. A newly married person who was previously a consumer of pornography may be able to leave it for a time with the novelty of intimacy with their new spouse, but they can easily find themselves falling into old habits when the novelty wears off. Pornography can thus doom your marriage before you even get married. Huge numbers of divorce cases now cite porn addiction as a reason for the breakdown of the relationship.

What is then the cure? Young men and women who are sexually desirous but unable to marry are advised to fast. 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd ؓ said that they lived in the company of the Prophet ﷺ as young men with no money. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ advised them:

O young men, whoever among you can afford it let him get married, for it is more effective in lowering the gaze and guarding one's chastity. And whoever cannot afford it should fast, for it will be a shield for him (*Bukhārī*, 4779; *Muslim*, 1400).

Along with fasting, some of the following can also be useful for dealing with sexual frustration: Cut out sugar and sugary foods, as well as meat (especially red meat), from your regular diet. Engage in some high-powered exercise to release your built-up energy. Be extremely careful to avoid masturbating when getting up first thing in the morning and when going to sleep at night. Because one is usually alone, these times are when young men tend to be the most vulnerable to masturbating. Avoid lounging in bed at other times of the day too. The bedroom should be for sleeping and getting dressed for the day. Have a regular *dhikr* regimen of various prayers,

remembrance and Qur'ān reading. Keep engaged with various different activities and hobbies. Keep the company of good people and a righteous *shaykh* if possible. Finally, and most importantly, perform abundant prayers to Allāh Most High to provide protection and steadfastness, for help only comes from Him.

For women, it can be devastating to find out that your spouse is watching pornography. It is natural to go through some of the typical stages of grief: anger, denial, bargaining and depression. The final stage of grief is usually acceptance, but coming to terms with your husband's porn use does not mean that you have to accept it and be okay with it. It is a major sin, and it is, despite whatever justification he may make, an act of betrayal. It could in many ways even be argued that consuming pornography is worse than real physical fornication, due to the abuses that take place in the industry that it supports, and the way the images of multiple women get easily ingrained in his mind and take over his heart. But the "acceptance" that you will need is to accept the fact that it has happened, that you cannot change the past and that it is not your fault. When coming to terms with this problem, you must try to remember that this sin that your husband is engaging in does not mean that he does not like you, or that you are not beautiful or good enough. I have found that these latter feelings is sometimes the biggest affront experienced by a woman in this situation.

As we have discussed previously, men have a powerful sexual drive and are attracted to the physical beauty of women. Even if you are the most beautiful woman in the world, and even if he loves you more than anyone else in the world, it is still natural for him to find other women attractive. The sexualised society we are living in and the continuing advances in technology are a disastrous recipe for the spread of porn use. It is clearly something that your husband has found easy to access and too difficult to resist. He may well feel very ashamed and guilty about this. As much as you feel betrayed and angry, you need to try to help him and not be an enemy to him because of it. You should try your best, when you are calm, to have the conversation with him out in the open and *inshā Allāh* any inse-

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curities you have will fade away. If you allow this problem to make you paranoid, if you end up constantly spying on your husband or allow it to make you lose your sense of self-esteem, you will only end up harming your own emotional state. At the end of the day, this is something that your husband will need to conquer on his own. Only he has the power to give it up. But you can help and provide support. It could be advised that both of you, together or separately, seek counselling to help come to terms with your feelings and to overcome the problem if it persists.

There is simply nothing good to be said of pornography. It is not sex education. It is not a way to improve a couple's sexual relationship. It is extremely harmful and a plague that needs to be eradicated. For people to learn about sex, there are other lawful methods that could be adopted. A normal sexual relationship is a gift from Allāh. It can be a source of great happiness and reward. I would advise the following two Qur'ānic and prophetic supplication to help overcome this addiction and gain sufficiency through your spouse:

﴿رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ﴾

Rabbanā wa lā tuḥammilnā mā lā ṭāqata lanā bih,

Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear (Baqara, 2:286).

اللَّهُمَّ اكْفِنِي بِحَلَالِكَ عَنْ حَرَامِكَ، وَأَغْنِنِي بِفَضْلِكَ عَمَّنْ سِوَاكَ

Allāhumma 'kfinī bi ḥalālika 'an ḥarāmika(a), wa aghninī bi faḍlika 'amman siwāk,

O Allāh, suffice me with Your lawful against Your unlawful, and make me independent by Your grace of all besides You (Tirmidhi, 3563).

Another suggested therapy is for one to resolve that they would rather die or go to prison than commit the sin. This is what the prophet Yūsuf ؑ did and his prayer to Allāh has been cited as follows in the Qur'ān:

﴿رَبِّ السِّجْنِ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِي إِلَيْهِ ۖ وَلَا تَصْرِفْ عَنِّي كَيْدَهُنَّ أَصْبُ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكُن مِّنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ﴾

My Lord, the prison is preferable to me than what these women call on me to do. Unless You turn their guile away from me, it may well be that I will fall for them and so become a man of ignorance (Yūsuf, 12:33).

Surely enough, he was assisted and Allāh says,

﴿فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ فَصَرَفَ عَنْهُ كَيْدَهُنَّ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ﴾

And his Lord answered his prayer and protected him from their treachery—He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing (Yūsuf, 12:34).

Allāh will place for you true beauty in your spouse, and it is by following the Qur'ān and Sunna that one may taste the sweetness of true love and intimacy in this life, as a glimpse of the eternal pleasure and happiness to be found in the next.

FLIRTATION, INFIDELITY AND PROMISCUITY

Another devastating issue that may afflict a marriage is infidelity. A marriage is a contract to share a life together, and it is an agreement made on the basis of trust and honesty. Honesty is an extremely important quality to look for in a marriage partner. You are so close to each other, both emotionally and physically, that you will come to know the most intimate subtleties of each other's behaviour. If one of you begins to be dishonest in any aspect of the relationship, eventually the other spouse *will* find out. There is no way to hide anything from your spouse. Lying will cause a huge breakdown in the relationship.

We are told in the Qur'ān:

﴿وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزَّوْجَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا﴾

And do not go anywhere near fornication: it is an outrage and an evil path (Isrā', 17:32).

We are told not only to not engage in *zinā*, but not even to approach it. This is a strong warning, as the detriment of it is extreme. The heartache, mistrust, sense of deception that comes from flirtation and the lead-up to *zinā* is truly heart-breaking. *Zinā* is an abominable, despicable act. Someone who does it will lie to cover it up, which leads to a web of lies and sins. There is a trajectory of falling into *zinā*: meeting someone occasionally in the open, then texting them, then secret phone conversations and sexting, then an in-person encounter. A slippery slope and steps of Satan. A person may have started out with no intention to go the full way in cheating on their spouse but may simply have been seeking a source of attention and validation. Some aspect of their marriage had been insufficient and so, in order to feel sought after, to have more romance, to feel the butterflies of a new relationship, they begin flirting with someone else. This could happen on the part of either the husband or the wife. Generally, we do see more complaints from women about their husbands than the other way around. Both can cheat but more likely for different reasons. Studies show that men are more likely to cheat to stay in sexless marriages, while women cheat to leave an exclusively sexual marriage that lacks emotional connection.

Some convince themselves that flirting by itself is innocent and relatively minor, as they only intend flirtation and not to take things any further. But in reality, is this flirtatious behaviour something that you would be happy for other people to know about? Is it something that deep down, when you honestly reflect on it, you think is okay? We are told that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Sin is that which creates turbulence in your heart and which you would dislike people finding out about" (*Muslim*, 2553).

There are extremes in attitudes in our community. Some people feel that it is completely impermissible to speak to the opposite gender even for a genuine need. Some hypocritically adopt extremely strict attitudes in the way they expect communication to be when

it comes to Muslims, but with non-Muslims they are happy to be lax and lower these standards. It is permissible in cases of need to communicate with unrelated members of the opposite gender (non-*maḥrams*), and this needs to be done with a pure intention and correct *adab*. Women often used to come to the Prophet ﷺ and to scholars of the early generations to ask questions. Allāh instructs women in the Qur'ān as follows:

﴿فَلَا تَخْضَعْنَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَيَطْمَعَ الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِهِ مَرَضٌ وَقُلْنَ قَوْلًا مَعْرُوفًا﴾

Do not speak too softly in case the sick at heart should lust after you, but speak in an appropriate manner (Aḥzāb, 33:32).

The approach when dealing with the opposite gender should be one of professionalism and formality, avoiding attracting undue attention, flirting, joking and making others feel uncomfortable. If a woman finds that her normal voice and manner of speaking is soft and alluring, she should make a greater effort to sound business-like in these situations. Aside from *professionalism*, there are three other etiquette to observe (the four Ps). Be *purposeful*, and ensure conversation is not idle chatting. Be *polite* so as not to cause offense. And keep it *public*, avoiding any situations where you are alone. Not surprisingly, this is some of the same guidance that has been provided by some corporate executives in the wake of major sexual assault scandals.¹ The benefits of modesty and *ḥayā'* in avoiding these issues are great. Taking care of the way one dresses and adopting *ḥijāb* are important, but at the end of the day, your clothes will not provide you with full protection from falling into impermissible behaviour. It is one's attitude and the way one carries oneself that will prevent this.

In the time of the Prophet ﷺ, one of his companions was faced with a temptation. Ka'b ibn Mālik ؓ had remained behind from the expedition of Tabūk because of his crops, and had intended to catch up with those who had departed. He was not able to do so in time

¹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-12-03/a-wall-street-rule-for-the-metoo-era-avoid-women-at-all-cost> (accessed 10/12/2018).

and felt bad that he had missed the expedition. Due to their absence, Ka'b ؓ and two other believers who had also stayed behind were not spoken to by the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and the community for fifty days. Especially in a society in which social relations mattered immensely, such ostracism was a huge test. One of the non-Muslim leaders sent a letter showing empathy to Ka'b and asking him to join them. You can imagine that Ka'b ؓ was at this stage in a very vulnerable position in the community and was facing a major trial. The appeal of the protection of a foreign leader would have been tempting, and this was a major *fitna* for him. Ka'b ؓ immediately threw the invitation into the fire, not allowing himself even to contemplate it (*Bukhārī*, 4418; *Muslim*, 2769). The temptation was immediately cut off. This is the attitude one should adopt in matters of temptation that one faces in our time also. Someone who finds themselves in an inappropriate situation should find a way to cut it off, to nip it in the bud and to resolve never to go down such a path. If you are in inappropriate communication with someone, you should give them a reply that pushes them off. If necessary, change your phone number. You should uproot the temptation at the source and work on improving your own marriage, and on rectifying your relationship with Allāh Most High.

Take the example of a married woman who is employed in full-time work in a liberal mixed environment. She gets up early in the morning and dresses attractively according to the demands of her workplace. She then arrives at work and spends several of the most productive hours of her day in the company of other men, closely working together on projects, emotionally sharing the successes and failures that certain tasks may involve, and trying to negotiate her way through the advances, inappropriate banter or outright sexual harassment. She then returns home each day exhausted to a husband who is also weary from his own work. Only a few could withstand the dangers of flirting or developing an illicit relationship.

An important point to clarify here is that there is no sanction in Islam for "platonic" friendships between non-*maḥram* (marriageable) men and women. Such friendships with the opposite gender are not

permitted. The "everything goes" or "We're just friends" attitude is a dangerous path.

If a woman finds her husband is flirting with other women, what should she do? This sort of situation can make a woman paranoid, to the extent that as soon as the husband goes out of the house she checks where he is going, looks at the car outside and goes through his phone messages and emails in the middle of the night mining for some painful discovery. She feels and knows that this is something she should not do, and it kills her inside, but she continues nevertheless. Spying in this way is not only unhealthy for you emotionally, but it is also impermissible. A wife needs to be up front with her husband about her concerns and have an open, calm conversation with him. You should also try to get counselling, or else this paranoia can be a path to self-destruction. You should not feel depressed and vulnerable and that you are not good enough. You need to help him to stop it going beyond this, and while it is not an excuse for his behaviour, there are many out there doing much worse. If you are facing this problem do not tell the whole world about your woes, but rather get some help from a wise friend, a local scholar or a counsellor.

There are many possible underlying reasons and solutions for this behaviour. Sometimes men are pushed in the direction of flirtation and seeking out admiration due to a lack of self-esteem. Perhaps things are not going so well at work, or maybe they are going "just too well" with a co-worker, or maybe his wife is not giving him enough attention or respect. She may spend a lot of time getting ready for weddings, whereas at the time when her husband returns home from work she is busy with the children and still in her slacks from cleaning up the house. He feels unloved and unimportant, and sneaking off to find some excitement in a new sexual conquest, where he can feel manly and confident again, is very tempting. This is never an excuse for a man to engage in impermissible behaviour. He is ultimately accountable for his own sins. A husband's infidelity cannot be blamed on his wife. But rather than simply point fingers and become angry or depressed, a woman in such a situation should consider how her behaviour may be contributing to the problem and

what she can do about it. If you are having problems in your sex life, a wife needs to face up to the fact that if you do not have sex with your husband, there is certainly another woman who will.

THE THORNY ISSUE OF POLYGAMY

There is so much *zinā* taking place in the Muslim community due to the sexualisation of our society, and one of the possible outlets for dealing with this in a *ḥalāl* way, that of polygamy, is not only illegal due to bigamy laws in Western countries but also frowned upon even within many Muslim communities. This is despite the fact that there are probably more legal justifications for legalising polygamy than there are for legitimising same-sex marriages. For now it remains a social taboo, although moral acceptance of it is on the increase. On the other hand, adultery in western societies is not illegal and leads to a situation of de facto polygamy being allowed anyway, although without legal recognition for non-official "spouses." Hence, people casually move in and out of extra marital relationships without any liability or sense of responsibility and leave behind numerous broken hearts in their wake.

Hence, polygamy and maintaining more than one wife¹ should not in and of itself be seen as a problem. It was the practice of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ as well as many of his companions and pious predecessors of this umma. However, in many cases that I have dealt with, people are doing it wrong, and this can have devastating consequences on families and marriages. Dishonesty, secret marriages, taking multiple wives while not giving them their rights and proclaiming divorce at the drop of a hat are all symptoms of a deranged attitude to this prophetic practice.

There is a definite sense of misery that will occur in the majority of co-wife situations. Jealousy, and especially the jealousy a woman would have of any other woman sharing the affection of her husband,

¹ In this section when I use the word marriage or wife, I use them in the context of a religious *nikāḥ*, and not as a civil registered spouse, unless I clarify otherwise.

is a natural instinct. We even find this in the time of the Prophet ﷺ himself. A wife of the Prophet ﷺ once sent a plate of food to him while he was staying with another of his wives. When the food came, the wife he was with struck the hand of the servant and caused the plate to drop and break. The Prophet himself reached down and started gathering the pieces of the plate together and scooping up the food in them saying, "*ghārat ummukum*," meaning, "your mother¹ has been overtaken by jealousy." He then asked the servant to wait until it was exchanged with another plate from the house of the wife he was with, and sent it to the one who had sent him the food and kept the broken one here (*Bukhārī*, 5225). Many such examples of the jealous antics of these co-wives exist, and surprisingly they were able to get away with quite a lot with the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ in their mini-feuds and competition among each other.

Even with the natural jealousy of women demonstrated above, and the annoyance and upset polygamy may inevitably cause to a woman, these factors were still overlooked in Allāh allowing it. This ultimately means that the need for a man to have more than one wife is greater than the hurt caused to women by a polygamous situation. My discussion with women on this subject reveals that some of the first thoughts that come to them in this situation include "Am I not enough?" "Am I not pretty or attractive?" "Am I defective?" From a man's perspective, this does not have to be the case at all. Men are just different creatures with a different physiology and psychology. As difficult as it may be, a woman should not feel that this means there is a deficiency in her as a wife. It is simply a fact about men that even if a man has the best wife in the world, he would still want another.

One woman I once counselled had seen her husband looking at images of celebrities on the internet, while she was just out of pregnancy with a new child. Although he is committing a sin, and probably also chose the worst time, a woman feels offended and ends up taking his inability to lower his gaze very personally. She feels "I'm not beautiful anymore." If you allow yourself to perpetuate such

¹ As all the wives are considered to be the mothers of the umma.

feelings this will lead to depression. It is part of the psychology of men to want variety. It could be said that men are naturally polygamous while women are naturally monogamous. Hence, women had not been allowed sex with their slaves, even though they could technically own them, while men were. What has been related of the different pleasures and rewards of men and women in Paradise also reflects this. It is then a major problem in the community that a bias against polygamy exists, such that a man's expressing that he wants another wife is somehow a slight on his first wife and a sign that she is defective. This is not an encouragement for polygamy, but women should be aware of the psychology of men and should consider these factors when processing the feelings that come with seeing their husband considering taking another wife or even bringing up the subject. It is not that he hates you or that you are not good enough.

To be clear, I do not encourage the taking of a second wife without the first wife's blessing, involvement and permission (which can be difficult, if not impossible, to get). But to provide some clarity, from a religio-legal perspective it is not necessary for a man to have her permission or to even tell her. This means that if he undertakes a *nikāh* with another woman without informing his other wife, it is not an invalid marriage from a religious point of view. But when we approach the topic with a little common sense, is not telling her wise? This is fundamentally an honesty issue. It is nearly impossible to maintain an entire new marriage without your first wife finding out. Some kind of problem will inevitably arise and she *will* find out. Even if a discussion takes place with her and a second marriage is conducted with full knowledge of all parties, there are many practical realities that arise in a polygamous situation that need to be carefully considered.

In one case I know of, a person took a second wife after taking assurances from her that she would not make certain demands. She was a widow and was happy to be married again, and so agreed to give up certain rights, such as the number of nights the husband would spend with her over the first wife, among other things. However, once the marriage had taken place and some time had passed, she started making demands for equality and spending the same number of nights

with the husband as the first wife among other demands. He realised then that such wifely needs could not be suppressed even if they had undertaken to forego them at the agreement stage. This reminds us that the reality of relationships and family dynamics are much more vast and complicated than the simplistic understandings we develop of marriage when we limit ourselves to looking at rights and duties alone. Marriage, though superficially resembling a business contract, is a fundamentally different kind of transaction. In a marriage it is very difficult to hold spouses liable for a contravention and then still maintain mutual love and affection, while in a business contract, a prolonged relationship is not necessary between the transacting party. The mere foundation of a successful marriage is accommodation, compromise and trust, all based on mutual love and compassion. How is it possible to suppress certain heartfelt needs and emotions while maintaining the love and affection required for a successful marriage?

A point I want to clarify here is that of what has been termed a *misyar* marriage. This is when, similar to the above scenario, a woman marries someone and explicitly agrees to forgo some marital rights, such as financial support, housing or an equal number of nights. The motivation behind this could be that she is busy with her occupation and therefore does not want to commit to a full-time relationship, or that she is a divorcee or widow who wants to focus on her children but still wants occasional companionship. Although such a marriage is technically valid, and intimacy and sexual intercourse are all lawful just as in a normal marriage, it remains controversial among scholars, many of whom consider it disliked on moral and prudential grounds. Nevertheless, for some it can be a practical solution to their loneliness or other problems.

To return to our discussion, unfortunately, while some do approach a second, third or fourth marriage with the correct intentions and strive to be fair between their wives, others use polygamy as a tool of exploitation. Another wife is not simply a "*ḥalāl* girlfriend" you can pick up because you are unable to control your base desires. Wives have rights over you, and the institution of marriage is a formal contract made before Allāh. The initial excitement of new romance

feelings this will lead to depression. It is part of the psychology of men to want variety. It could be said that men are naturally polygamous while women are naturally monogamous. Hence, women had not been allowed sex with their slaves, even though they could technically own them, while men were. What has been related of the different pleasures and rewards of men and women in Paradise also reflects this. It is then a major problem in the community that a bias against polygamy exists, such that a man's expressing that he wants another wife is somehow a slight on his first wife and a sign that she is defective. This is not an encouragement for polygamy, but women should be aware of the psychology of men and should consider these factors when processing the feelings that come with seeing their husband considering taking another wife or even bringing up the subject. It is not that he hates you or that you are not good enough.

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and infatuation will wear off, after which you will still have another wife and family to maintain. Secretly contracting marriages, hoping that your first wife and the rest of the family and community do not find out, is contrary to the spirit of Shari'a, in which a marriage should be publicly announced so that people know.

Furthermore, taking another wife simply because you are having problems in your first marriage is definitely not a solution. If you are finding it difficult to manage one marriage, how do you expect to manage two? A woman finding herself in a polygamous situation in which her rights are not being preserved should seek help. And a woman who is being proposed to by a man who is already officially married to another needs to consider her situation very well. Remember, he will not be able to marry you as a civilly recognised wife, unless he civilly divorces his wife first, since bigamy is illegal in most Western countries. Hence, you are most likely to be unofficially married to him in a religious *nikāh*, which will make you *ḥalāl* for each other. However, since there is no official recognition for this type of marriage, he could very easily give you a *ṭalāq* one day and disappear, and you will have no protection or recourse to anything from him.

Therefore, the option of having more than one wife, which is a prophetic *sunna* and a potential solution to certain social problems, is sadly used by some as a tool for abuse and exploitation and this needs to stop.

It is very sensible that every couple sits down to discuss polygamy even if it is something that they do not plan to consider. This is simply so that both can be open and candid about the subject, gauge the other's views on it and ensure that it is not left as the elephant in the room and open to conjecture.

INFERTILITY

One of the most difficult and emotionally challenging predicaments for some couples is the inability to conceive. Children are considered

a blessing and a social necessity by the community, and it is of course one of the main purposes of marriage. No more than a few months into a marriage and the questions generally begin as to when the baby is due. The more time that passes, the more the questions may intensify from family and friends. If a couple have not been able to conceive, the questions can be very difficult to deal with. How many times do you explain to people that you are trying? How many times do you keep requesting them to pray for you as nothing has happened yet? Then you are forced to listen to the multitudes of cures and therapies people suggest. Everyone suddenly becomes a fertility expert.

For many individuals, dealing with infertility can lead to a great deal of anxiety, stress and even depression. Some become reclusive and stop meeting people altogether. People need to be sensitive about the feelings of others. While questions such as "Are you pregnant?" or "When is the baby coming?" may appear innocent enough, repeatedly asking them may be leading to untold miseries for them. A woman with infertility issues wrote to me saying that she is made to feel like she is not a whole woman by questions such as "What are you waiting for? It's time to get pregnant." People cannot just produce babies from thin air, and they cannot be ordered online with next-day delivery. If you are genuinely concerned about someone having a baby, pray for them. Stop telling them to try harder. They can't. The matter is not in their hands. Children are bestowed by Allāh, and He alone chooses what He wills for each person and at the time He deems appropriate. He Most High says,

﴿لِلّٰهِ مُلْكُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ ۚ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَآءُ ۚ يَهَبُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ اِنَاثًا وَيَهَبُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ الذَّكَوْرَ ۝ اَوْ يَزْوِجُهُمْ ذَكَرًا وَّاِنَاثًا وَيَجْعَلُ مَن يَشَآءُ عَقِيْمًا ۚ اِنَّهُ عَلِيْمٌ قَدِيْرٌ﴾

God has control of the heavens and the earth; He creates whatever He will—He grants female offspring to whomever He will and male offspring to whomever He will, or bestows them both male and female, and He makes whoever He will barren: He is all knowing and all powerful (Shūrā, 42:49–50).

No one can impose their will on Allāh, and He is not obligated by anyone to provide them children. However, He is the Wise (Ḥakīm), the Compassionate (Raḥmān), and the Most Loving (Wadūd), along with being the Omnipotent (Qadīr) and Omniscient (ʿAlīm) Lord of the Worlds. So He does as He chooses, and He administers the affairs of the world as He wills, and no one can interrupt or rescind His commands. However, His actions are based on great wisdom and prudence and are totally devoid of even the slightest oppression. He makes this clear to us in the Qurʾān: “Your Lord is never unjust to His creatures” (Fuṣṣilat, 41:46); “And your Lord wrongs no one” (Kahf, 18:49); “Your Lord is all knowing and wise” (Yūsuf, 12:6); and “For Allāh is most compassionate and most merciful toward people” (Baqara, 2:143). However, He also makes it clear: “He cannot be called to account for anything He does, whereas they will be called to account” (Anbiyāʾ, 21:23). We cannot do anything but submit to His decree.

Our responsibility is to exercise patience and attempt to be satisfied with His decree. We do not know what the future holds. It is possible that for some people having children may make their life more miserable. Maybe they would not be able to properly take care of their children and would be accountable for that in the hereafter. Sometimes a couple may feel that their happiness will be in having children but Allāh knows otherwise. He gives them children and their entire life is then spent in misery due to that child. Yet with others, Allāh may have some other greater service in store for them to occupy their time. Perhaps He has foreordained for them to make a significant contribution to the world and benefit mankind, and that is a more than a suitable replacement to having children. We may know people who do not have children and who have produced some impressive work due to being relieved of child responsibilities. There have been many great people who were content despite not having children, such as Lady ʿĀʾisha ؓ, the wife of the Prophet ﷺ, who focused on teaching the community. A celebrated Indian scholar and author of about a thousand books, Shaykh Ashraf ʿAlī Thanawī, who was known by the title Ḥakīm al-Umma (Spiritual Physician

of the Umma), had two wives but did not leave any children. This is Allāh’s will at play.

For many others, it is just a matter of time. They will have children but not immediately. Rather, at a more opportune time that only Allāh knows. A friend of mine, who was originally from Bangladesh, moved to America. He was not very practising at the time and ended up marrying a white woman who was a devout Christian. He tells me that in the evenings his wife would be reading her Bible while he would watch Bollywood movies. Nearly a decade into their marriage, he was convinced by members of the Tablighī Jamāt to accompany them and help invite others to come and pray in the mosque. This had a positive influence on him, and he started to change his lifestyle and became more devout. He went on to help found the first mosque in his area and lead the *daʿwa* work there. His wife, who was already spiritually inclined, took an interest in Islam and eventually became a Muslim. What is interesting is that all this time they were unable to have children. However, after this they were blessed with their first child. In hindsight, he is convinced by the wisdom in the delay they encountered in conceiving children. The right environment or stability in life had not existed for him earlier to bring up children as he now had. He has since been granted several more children.

Another challenge people in some cultures face is having all girls. The pressure mounts on them to produce a male offspring. This is sometimes a greater challenge than not having any children at all. The stress in this case is generally induced by the extended family, many times the in-laws. To this day, a message still haunts me of a distraught mother who emailed me to request special prayers for her. She said (paraphrased), “I am pregnant and due to deliver tomorrow. Until now I have had just daughters and no sons. Tomorrow, if I do not have a son I don’t know what they will do to me.” Those who torment women this way should realise, from Allāh’s words above “He grants female offspring to whomever He will and male offspring to whomever He will” (Shūrā, 42:50), that they are in effect complaining about the Almighty’s apportionment and decree. Remember, Allāh’s beloved Messenger ﷺ had no surviving male children, and there are

ḥadīth from him regarding the reward of having female children. Shaming people for not having male offspring maybe seen a few steps removed from female infanticide and is truly a sick attitude.

HOLISTIC TREATMENTS

Hereunder, I would like to suggest a holistic approach to follow for people who have trouble conceiving children. What I suggest is not only a potential remedy for infertility but for any ailment a person may suffer, from cancer and other serious diseases down to allergies or even benign skin rash.

The first port of call for a lot of people when they have a physical ailment, such as the inability to conceive children, is to see a medical doctor. If one doctor cannot resolve their problem, they follow it up with visits to other physicians, specialists and fertility clinics. Some people may venture beyond allopathic solutions to alternatives such as herbal, naturopathic, homeopathic or Ayurvedic medicine. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this approach, as seeking a cure is religiously mandated. Travel the world if you have to in search of the best therapy and avail yourselves of it as long as there is nothing unlawful in it.

However, alongside this, we as Muslims have some other very powerful options to turn to, which many often neglect. I will discuss them here in some detail.

Prayer and sincere supplication to Allāh. Allāh says, “[Prophet], if My servants ask you about Me, I am near. I respond to those who call Me, so let them respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be guided” (Baqara, 2:186). A beautiful and relevant example is provided in the Qur’ān of the Prophet Zakariyyā ﷺ. Despite being of advanced age, beset with physical weakness and a wife who is barren, he turns his attention to Allāh and says, “Lord, my bones have weakened and my hair is ashen grey, but never, Lord, have I ever prayed to You in vain. . . .” (Maryam, 19:4). The response he receives is: “O Zakariyyā, We bring you good news of a son whose

name will be Yahyā” (Maryam, 19:7). So from a worldly perspective what was considered infertility was cured by Allāh, as everything is in His control. Allāh retells this event two more times in the Qur’ān (see Āl ‘Imrān, 3:38–39; Anbiyā’, 21:89–90) to show that He responds to those who call unto Him regardless of how improbable the task may seem from a human perspective. The secret is sincerity, regularity and persistence in your supplication. Invoke the great name of Allāh (*Im Allāh al-A‘ẓam*) through the various formulas it is said to be contained in (for these prayers, see our edition of *Al-Hizb al-A‘ẓam*, White Thread Press, 2017, p. 21) and seek out the opportune moments of acceptance, such as the last third portion of the night and before the sun sets on Friday evening.

There are some Qur’ānic supplications for having children. One has been mentioned before in the section on children above. The other is the prayer of Zakariyyā ﷺ himself:

﴿رَبِّ لَا تَذَرْنِي فَرْدًا وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْوَارِثِينَ﴾

Rabbi lā tadharnī fardaw wa Anta khayru ‘l-wāriṭhīn,

My Lord, do not leave me alone, though You are the best of heirs (Anbiyā’, 21:89).

Once a person followed me out after a talk I gave on the subject of potential cures for infertility. He remarked that he was a living example of the power of sincere prayer. Married for seven years, he and his wife had not been able to conceive. Although he had given up, his wife had persisted and eventually, after all else had failed, started offering the *tahajjud* prayer at night to beseech Allāh in moments of desperation. This was the tipping point. They received an outpouring of divine mercy and were blessed with their first child. Do not underestimate the power of prayer.

Seeking forgiveness from Allāh. We are sometimes deprived of certain bounties due to sins we have committed, and which have not been erased from our records through repentance. They cling like a parasite in our system and prevent us from functioning correctly. The Qur’ān actually prescribes seeking forgiveness as a remedy for

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seeking offspring. Allāh says, "I said, 'Ask forgiveness of your Lord, He is ever forgiving. He will send down abundant rain from the sky for you, He will give you wealth *and sons* [italics mine], He will provide you with gardens and rivers'" (Nūḥ, 71:10-12).

Reciting the Qur'an. Many may consider infertility to be induced through the evil eye ('ayn) or sorcery (siḥr). This should not be assumed to be the case, but it is still highly beneficial to recite a *ruqya*. The most effective *ruqya* cures are through the verses of the Qur'an itself, such as Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (1), al-Ikhlāṣ (112), al-Falaq (113) and al-Nās (114). Allāh says, "We send down the Qur'an as healing and mercy to those who believe" (Isrā', 17:82).

Invocations for protection. Along with the above Qur'ānic formulas, there are several other supplications of cure and protection. The two below are very comprehensive and powerful prayers, and should be recited three times every morning and evening for the protection for the rest of the day or night:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَا يَضُرُّ مَعَ اسْمِهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

Bismi 'Llāhi 'lladhi lā yaḍurru ma-'a 'smihī shay'un fi 'l-arḍi wa lā fi 's-samā'i wa Huwa 's-Samī-'u 'l-'Alīm.

In the name of Allāh by whose name nothing on earth and nothing in heaven can cause harm. He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing (Tirmidhī, 3388).

أَعُوذُ بِكَلِمَاتِ اللَّهِ التَّامَّاتِ مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ

A-'ūdhu bi kalimāti 'Llāhi 't-tāmmāti min sharri mā khalaq.

I seek refuge in the perfect words of Allāh from all the evil He has created (Muslim, 2708).

I have found a particular prophetic supplication extremely beneficial, especially for various pains or aches. Sometimes, if I feel the onset of an allergy and feel the histamines preparing their defence against perceived allergens, I will place my hand on my nose and read the prayer seven times. It almost seems hard to believe, but it has by

Allāh's mercy worked time and time again to restore the system balance. This is the supplication:

اللَّهُمَّ رَبَّ النَّاسِ، أَذْهِبِ الْبَأْسَ، إِشْفِهِ وَأَنْتَ الشَّافِي، لَا شِفَاءَ إِلَّا شِفَاؤُكَ، شِفَاءً لَا يُغَادِرُ سَقَمًا

Allāhumma Rabba 'n-nās(i), adhhibi 'l-ba's(a), ishfihi wa Anta 'sh-Shāfi, lā shifā'a illā shifā'uk(a), shifā'al lā yughādiru saqamā.

O Allāh, Lord of mankind, remove all harm, and cure, as You are the one Who cures. There is no cure but Your cure: a cure that leaves no illness (Bukhārī, 5743; Muslim, 2191).

Travelling to the Holy Sanctuaries for Pilgrimage. Many of our pious forebears travelled to Makkah to pray at the Ka'ba to have a need of theirs fulfilled. Supplicating during the *ṭawāf* and *sa'y*, and when completing the rites at Mina, Muzdalifa and 'Arafāt, and of course in the Prophet's Mosque ﷺ in the illuminated city of Madinah, is very powerful. Due to the state of being a traveller and the sanctity of these places, the chances of success in one's endeavours can be all but guaranteed.

Prophetic remedies. Finally, do not neglect the seven products suggested either in the Qur'an or by the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ as containing cures for various ailments. The first in this is Zamzam water, which is said in the ḥadīth to benefit anything it is consumed for (Ibn Māja, 3062; Musnad Aḥmad, 14849). Another is honey, which is mentioned as a cure in the Qur'an (Nāḥl, 16:69). Try to acquire the purest natural honey you can and do not just pick up the cheapest one on the supermarket shelves. The Prophet ﷺ also recommended that seven 'ajwa dates be consumed in the morning as a source of protection, even from poison (see Bukhārī, 5445; Muslim, 2047). Another is black seed. He ﷺ said, "Black seed contains a cure for every sickness except death" (Bukhārī, 5688; Muslim, 2215). Along with these are fennel (*sannūt*), senna (*sanā*) and costus (*qusṭ hindi*), all have been recommended in the ḥadīths as being beneficial for ailments.

While a steady supply of Zamzam water may be difficult and

seeking offspring. Allāh says, "I said, 'Ask forgiveness of your Lord, He is ever forgiving. He will send down abundant rain from the sky for you, He will give you wealth *and sons* [italics mine], He will provide you with gardens and rivers'" (Nūḥ, 71:10-12).

Reciting the Qur'ān. Many may consider infertility to be induced through the evil eye (*ʿayn*) or sorcery (*siḥr*). This should not be assumed to be the case, but it is still highly beneficial to recite a *ruqya*. The most effective *ruqya* cures are through the verses of the Qur'ān itself, such as Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (1), al-Ikhlāṣ (112), al-Falaq (113) and al-Nās (114). Allāh says, "We send down the Qur'ān as healing and mercy to those who believe" (Isrā', 17:82).

Invocations for protection. Along with the above Qur'ānic formulas, there are several other supplications of cure and protection. The two below are very comprehensive and powerful prayers, and should be recited three times every morning and evening for the protection for the rest of the day or night:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَا يَضُرُّ مَعَ اسْمِهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

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While a steady supply of Zamzam water may be difficult and

'ajwā dates may prove too expensive to consume seven of each morning, honey and black seed are much easier to acquire. Black seed is now available in various forms, so if one form does not work try it in another. Maybe some of these products can be incorporated into the household cooking or particular meals. I have also come across a convenient mixture of all seven products together in a paste sold by a friend in Madinah. Take as many of the above curative (*shifā'*) products as you can, and give them to your children and family with the intention of prophetic cure.

For a Muslim, a comprehensive approach to seeking a cure needs to include ardent supplications, heartfelt prayer, focused Qur'an recitation, sincere invocations for forgiveness, and a medley of *shifā'* products, along with seeking a cure in any other form of medicine.

Also, those who are suffering from infertility, keep your hopes up, but consign your matter to Allāh. Many have said that they were given children when they gave up the worry. In this predicament you will also have to learn to deal with the comments, questions and remarks. I don't think most people who inquire do so out of jealousy or with evil intent. Most will be honest enough inquiries, and it is somewhat a norm to inquire about others, sometimes even when inappropriate, so you cannot expect to change everyone. Consider this part of your trial. Tolerate it as it will only raise your status in Allāh's sight, for He loves the patient ones. Muslims also uniquely have the concept of *riḍā' bi 'l-qadā'*, which is, "satisfaction with Allāh's decree." If after taking all the means possible you still remain without children, be content with whatever Allāh has decreed for you and trust that there is good in it.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is undeniably a problem in our communities. The statistics show that it is not a thing unique to Muslims or to non-Muslims. Simply being Muslim does not make us immune to the social ills that surround us. For us, though, the difficulty surrounding

domestic violence concerns a particular verse in the Qur'an, often misunderstood, misinterpreted and then used to justify abuse. These misunderstandings must be corrected.

In the Qur'an, Allāh Most High says,

﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ ۚ وَاللَّاتِي تَحَافُوتَ ۚ نُسُورَهُنَّ فَيَعْطُوهُنَّ وَأَهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۖ فَإِنْ أَطَعْتَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا ۝﴾

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allāh has preferred the one above the other and because they spend their wealth on them. Righteous wives are devout and guard what Allāh would have them guard in their husbands' absence. If you fear high-handedness from your wives, remind them [of the teachings of Allāh], then ignore them when you go to bed, then hit them. If they obey you, you have no right to act against them: Allāh is most high and great (Nisā', 4:34).

This verse speaks about the status of men and women, the characteristics of great women, and about the disobedience of the wife to the husband, with a strict step-by-step process of the measures to be taken in such a situation. Scholars and communities from various countries differ in their interpretation of this verse. Some modern explanations and Qur'an translations miss the point completely or distort the original understanding of the verse due to social, cultural and political influences and pressures. By consulting some of the earliest sources of Qur'an interpretation, we come to a basic uniform understanding that interpreting the word *darb* in the verse as "beating" is incorrect, due to the common connotations of "beating" in English.

Beating refers to "an act of striking with repeated blows so as to injure or damage" (Merriam Webster) or "a punishment or assault in which the victim is hit repeatedly" (Oxford). Rather, *darb* here is more a symbolic physical reprimand, a hit or tap, to express dis-

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pleasure, not hitting with the intention to cause a wound or other physical harm, or even anything that would leave marks. The face and any other sensitive areas have to be absolutely avoided in any case. Such conditions are clearly contrary to what is generally understood by "beating." Many of the ḥadīths that have been related from the Prophet ﷺ regarding hitting describe this *ḍarb* as being "*ghayr mubarrīḥ*" (for instance, see *Muslim*, 1218), which means "non-severe and non-violent" (Lane's Lexicon). Similarly, when the Prophet's ﷺ cousin Ibn 'Abbās ؓ, the famous exegete among the companions, was asked its meaning, he explained that it meant striking her with a *siwāk* or the like (Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 8:314). A *siwāk* is a toothstick usually the size of a straw or so. A reading of many of the earliest *tafsīr* sources, such as Ṭabarī (d. 310/922), Ibn Abi Ḥātim (d. 327/938), Tha'labī (d. 427/1035), Wāḥidī (d. 468/1075), Sam'ānī (d. 489/1096) and Baghawī (d. 510/1116), confirms this understanding.

Even then, to take any physical action is the final stage after all the preceding steps have been taken, and only if those steps are to no avail. When the husband finds her high-handed and in contravention of the religious demands of marriage, he is first to verbally advise and admonish her. If this does not work, then he is to ignore her in bed, meaning to leave off intimacy with her. All of this is to clearly express his displeasure and to bring the relationship back on its tracks. If this does not work, only then does the verse sanction the right to *ḍarb*. In most cases, it could be assumed that the situation would probably be too far gone to be repaired even with a hit. What type of marriage can survive in any healthy way once the situation reaches this level anyway? Hence, hitting is not an obligatory last step, but rather an optional desperate and final measure to save the relationship, and that probably only in some cultures. Unfortunately, in the cases of abuse (as it is rightly termed), this process and the conditions mentioned are hardly ever followed.

Some have translated *ḍarb* as "separation," "going away" or "departing," likely in an attempt to avoid the connotation of hitting entirely. This is disingenuous as it is not corroborated by the classical sources and centuries of scholarship. Apologists would like to claim

that no physical element to discipline exists in the Qur'ān. But how can something mentioned clearly in the Qur'ān be denied. On the other hand, there are some who think the go-to method is always the rod and invoke the above verse in their defence. These are two extremes, and both are wrong.

If we now turn to the prophetic practice in this regard, as that is the primary source we turn to for understanding of the Qur'ān, we find that the Prophet ﷺ never hit any of his wives. He had many wives at the same time, and there were certainly occasions when he got upset, just as in any other family setting. It is related that he stopped speaking to them, even for up to a month on one occasion, but he did not hit them. His youngest wife, Lady 'Ā'isha ؓ, reports that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ never struck anything with his hand, neither women nor servant (*Muslim*, 2328; *Abū Dāwūd*, 4786).

At one time, the Prophet ﷺ completely prohibited the companions from hitting by saying, "Do not hit the female servants of Allāh." Soon 'Umar ؓ came and reported that women had become emboldened and disobedient toward their husbands. So the Prophet ﷺ lifted the prohibition. Then a number of women came to his wives to complain of their husbands. So the Prophet ﷺ made an announcement discouraging those who hit that such men were not the best among you (see *Abū Dāwūd*, 2146; *Mirqāt al-Mafātīḥ*, 5:2127).

Another time the Prophet ﷺ exhorted, "None of you should beat your wife as he would a slave, then make love to her at the end of the day" (*Bukhārī*, 5204). This is to highlight that beating someone as described could only have been caused by revulsion of the wife. So he is saying how can anyone with even a bit of sense beat up his wife, and then still feel comfortable enough to make love to her in the evening if he reviles her so much. It is sadly the case that there are people who beat their wives, with wilful disregard for the teachings of Islam. This behaviour is completely repulsive.

My observation is that people of any faith or no faith hit because it is their local culture to do so. Both the men and women are accustomed to the system and feel that it is the only way to get anything done. This system is not what Islam calls toward. Sometimes it stems

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from things we've seen in our own families, or something from movies or dramas. Once, a friend disclosed to me that he had beaten his wife. He was clearly horrified at himself for having stooped to this level. It came as a shock to me too because he did not strike me as a violent person. He never repeated such aggression again. My assessment was that he had unwittingly resorted to such behaviour based on what he may have observed in his family or community. Such unhealthy cultural models must be deconstructed and eliminated.

Domestic abuse does not just take place through physical beating. Sometimes emotional and psychological abuse is much worse, whether that be through controlling or coercive behaviour, intimidation and threats, sustained criticism, undermining, name calling, making them feel insignificant, withholding money or even the silent treatment. It makes the victim feel worthless and kills their self-esteem, which results in them harbouring grudges and hate for their spouse. Some people endure this throughout their married lives. They should not have to do so.

Someone involved in the perpetration of any abuse should go and seek forgiveness immediately. He should ask himself: Why am I doing this? Is this going to make her love me more? Or is she going to only hate me due to my degrading oppression? The dignity, honour and respect that must exist between husband and wife is destroyed with beating and violence, whether it be physical or emotional and psychological. It does not foster respectful obedience; it only makes her life a living hell. If you have reached the level of abusing or beating your wife, there is a serious problem and you need to get professional help. Beating your wife will not solve your issues.

It should also be remembered that there are a minority of cases, sizeable in their own right, in which the abuse can go the other way and a man finds himself to be the victim. In the vast majority of cases, though, it is men abusing women. If either spouse has a problem with the other, the way to overcome the issue is never violence but positive reinforcement and open communication.

It is in the nature of this world that we be faced with problems and things we don't like, but it is up to us to focus on the positive.

It is sad that so many people, after years or decades of being married, have not broken the ice and tasted the true sweetness of marriage. People are missing the true sense of what a healthy relationship between a husband and wife is meant to mean. Domestic violence has no place in this relationship, and those who find themselves victim should know that this is not what their religion allows or condones and should seek help, whether that is by getting other members of the family involved or going to the authorities.

OVERCOMING MARITAL PROBLEMS

The above examples represent just some of the possible problems that a couple may face over the course of their married life. When dealing with these or other issues, there are many potential steps that can be taken.

In this first instance, spouses should try to work out the issues together without involving third parties. Excessively seeking advice from others, who may not even be able to help in the situation, can do more harm than good. It can cause embarrassment and mistrust, souring wider family relations and potentially aggravating the problem. Spouses should accept the fact that it is normal to have bumps in the road over the course of their marriage, and they need to learn to communicate openly, each accepting their own wrongdoings and learning to apologise and compromise. If things have gotten to the stage that either spouse has left the marital home to stay elsewhere, the other should try to convince them to come back so that they can talk things over in a private atmosphere, with love and sympathy.

One possible step a couple facing difficulties could take is to renew the *nikāḥ* between them. Contrary to popular belief, *nikāḥ* can be performed more than once to refresh it. In fact, according to some scholars like the great Syrian jurist of the 13th century CE, Ibn 'Ābidīn al-Shāmī (d. 1252/1836), couples should refresh their marriage once in a while. People sometimes utter blasphemies or obscenities without realising it to be a statement of disbelief (*kufṛ*),

from things we've seen in our own families, or something from movies or dramas. Once, a friend disclosed to me that he had beaten his wife. He was clearly horrified at himself for having stooped to this level. It came as a shock to me too because he did not strike me as a violent person. He never repeated such aggression again. My assessment was that he had unwittingly resorted to such behaviour based on what he may have observed in his family or community. Such unhealthy cultural models must be deconstructed and eliminated.

Domestic abuse does not just take place through physical beating. Sometimes emotional and psychological abuse is much worse, whether that be through controlling or coercive behaviour, intimidation and threats, sustained criticism, undermining, name calling, making them feel insignificant, withholding money or even the silent treatment. It makes the victim feel worthless and kills their self-esteem, which results in them harbouring grudges and hate for their spouse. Some people endure this throughout their married lives. They should not have to do so.

Someone involved in the perpetration of any abuse should go and seek forgiveness immediately. He should ask himself: Why am I doing this? Is this going to make her love me more? Or is she going to only hate me due to my degrading oppression? The dignity, honour and respect that must exist between husband and wife is destroyed with beating and violence, whether it be physical or emotional and psychological. It does not foster respectful obedience; it only makes her life a living hell. If you have reached the level of abusing or beating your wife, there is a serious problem and you need to get professional help. Beating your wife will not solve your issues.

It should also be remembered that there are a minority of cases, sizeable in their own right, in which the abuse can go the other way and a man finds himself to be the victim. In the vast majority of cases, though, it is men abusing women. If either spouse has a problem with the other, the way to overcome the issue is never violence but positive reinforcement and open communication.

It is in the nature of this world that we be faced with problems and things we don't like, but it is up to us to focus on the positive.

It is sad that so many people, after years or decades of being married, have not broken the ice and tasted the true sweetness of marriage. People are missing the true sense of what a healthy relationship between a husband and wife is meant to mean. Domestic violence has no place in this relationship, and those who find themselves victim should know that this is not what their religion allows or condones and should seek help, whether that is by getting other members of the family involved or going to the authorities.

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which may unwittingly remove them from their faith and cause their marriage to be nullified. The faith is reinstated by reciting the *shahāda* (the testimony) or performing the next prayer or other act of worship. However, the *nikāḥ* does not automatically renew and must be formally performed again, otherwise the couple will be living together in sin as their marriage is invalid. The late Mufti Nizām al-Dīn A'zamī (d. 1420/2000), the head *mufti* of Dār al-Ulūm Deoband in India, had for a while counselled a couple with marital problems. One day, he called in two witnesses and conducted their *nikāḥ* again. Their conflicts soon stopped. They came to him after some time wondering what had made the difference. He explained that during his interaction with them, he had noticed that they were not very careful with their tongues, and it was likely that one of them had uttered a blasphemy while angry, thus nullifying their marriage. Due to the absence of *nikāḥ*, they had been deprived of the blessings and had unknowingly been living a life of fornication. Therefore, reestablishment of their *nikāḥ* restored the blessing of a lawful union and many of their problems disappeared.

If a marital problem is such that the couple are not able to come to a resolution between them, or if there is a situation of abuse or immediate harm, one should reach out to seek help and advice from those one trusts. This could be with the intention of simply seeking advice on the issue, or to seek mediation such that this third party gets involved to try to reconcile between the spouses. The person should be one that can be trusted to act as a go-between in an unbiased way. For this reason, although parents, in-laws or responsible friends could be called upon, they may not always be the best people to consult. It depends very much on what the situation calls for. A qualified traditional scholar or dignified older member of the local community could be asked to assist with the situation and provide some guidance.

Another possible avenue for seeking outside help would be to consult a culturally sensitive marriage counsellor. There is an unfortunate stigma in our communities attached to the idea of marriage

counselling and to therapy in general. It is completely normal that in the course of one's life one will experience particularly stressful and difficult situations. A counsellor is expected to be an experienced, recognised professional who is able to provide a neutral, safe space for you to work out the causes of the problems you are facing and how you can work out a plan to overcome them. For marriage counselling in particular, counsellors are expected to be skilled in being impartial, and so allow for you and your spouse to speak to someone who is not taking sides, which would be much more difficult if you approached family members who are emotionally involved and partial to some extent. Counselling, whether for you as a couple or even just as an individual, can prove extremely beneficial in helping you to come to terms with your emotions, faults and problems.

In situations where abuse is taking place, one should be prepared to escalate to the authorities where necessary. A person should not be discouraged from calling the police because of the "shame" this might cause to the family. When I receive a call from women about domestic violence, it nearly always turns out that it has been going on for some time. I generally recommend that they report the violence since people who have been instinctively striking their wives do not change without intense pressure or retribution. Examples need to be made such that the social ills in our communities can be eradicated and that it is made crystal clear that abuse of any kind will not be tolerated.

It is a sad reality that many couples will face one or more of the issues mentioned in this chapter at some point over the course of their marriage. Life in this world is full of difficulties and tribulations. Many such problems can be prevented by finding a spouse who is compatible, marrying with sincere intentions and realistic expectations, living a life based on *taqwā*, and working actively on marital communication such that issues can be prevented before they escalate. If problems become worse, couples should strive to come to a solution by taking some of the steps mentioned above, and through Allāh's mercy a resolution may be achieved. If all avenues have been

exhausted and the couple are still unable to resolve their problem or tolerate being together, divorce is reserved as a last resort. This is the subject of the next and final chapter.



My Mercy encompasses all things
(A'raf, 7:156).



Chapter 10



DIVORCE

Those who are still in the early stages of learning about marriage, either still looking to get married or recently married, may think that the issue of divorce is far off. Others may argue that discussing it at length alongside marriage is unnecessary, as we are aiming for marriage, not divorce. I discussed some of the basic rulings of divorce during a few marriage ceremonies, and some friends found it astonishing and perhaps a bit out of place. But the reality is before us. It is a sad fact that divorce rates are skyrocketing. *Everyone* should acquaint themselves with a sound understanding of the subject, such that they are able to draw lessons, internalise them, and in so doing protect themselves from the evil consequences of an unintended or hasty divorce.

If a husband and wife face a situation in which they have exhausted all possible ways of resolving their problems and still have irreconcilable differences, and to stay together would be untenable, Allāh most High has permitted them to divorce. I have come across many cases in which the husbands refused to grant divorces despite their marriage reaching a point of no return. The husbands felt that it was sinful and unlawful for them to say the words of divorce, even though their marriages could not continue and their wives did not want to remain with them any longer. Only after much convincing did they rectify their attitude. In many Christian traditions, to

divorce is regarded as sinful, except in some extreme circumstances, and the marriage should be kept "until death do us part." It is not so severe in Islam. However, the permissibility of divorce is accompanied by an understanding, which is elaborated in a statement of the Prophet ﷺ, where he says, "The most detested of all lawful acts in the sight of Allāh Most Glorious Most High is divorce" (*Abū Dāwūd*, 2178).

Of all things lawful, to divorce is the worst and most detested, and it is with great reluctance that it has been made permissible. Islam recognises that divorce may at times be necessary and the only possible way forward, so this avenue is left open, but it should always be treated as a last resort. Given the severity of the wording used by the Prophet ﷺ, it is important for all Muslims to acquaint themselves with sound knowledge of the nature and rulings of divorce, such that they do their utmost to avoid it and, if they are forced to divorce, they do so in the manner decreed by Allāh Most High.

Although divorce carries this detestability, its permissibility indicates Allāh's understanding of the nature and the differing circumstances of human beings. It may be that two people have married and, either due to a fundamental incompatibility (which should have been avoided initially) or due to changing circumstances, they can no longer maintain a functioning marriage. The Companions were not immune to such realities, and we find examples of divorce mentioned in numerous ḥadīths. One poignant example is narrated on the authority of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās ؓ, regarding the wife of a companion named Thābit ibn Qays ؓ. She came to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and said, "O Messenger of Allāh, I do not have any complaints about Thābit ibn Qays in regard to any issue of character or religion. However, I dislike ingratitude (*kufṛ*) in Islam." The Messenger ﷺ asked, "Are you prepared to return his orchard to him." She agreed. So he ؓ told Thābit, "Accept the orchard and grant her one divorce" (*Bukhārī*, 5273).

She articulated her feelings of not wishing to stay with her husband any longer and wanting separation in the following terms: "I dislike ingratitude (*kufṛ*) in Islam," meaning that since there was no

love between them and she had a natural aversion to him, she did not want it to lead to disobedience, dispute, or anything else disliked that may come thereof. So the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ told her she could seek a divorce.¹ We see from this that Islam does not force people to remain together if there are valid reasons for separation. In fact, Allāh promises the following:

﴿وَإِنْ يَتَفَرَّقَا يُغْنِ اللَّهُ كُلًّا مِنْ سَعَتِهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ وَاسِعًا حَكِيمًا﴾

But if they [husband and wife] do separate, Allāh will provide for each out of His plenty: He is infinite in plenty, and all wise (*Nisā'*, 4:130).

Understanding the rulings of divorce is essential, not only as it is personally obligatory knowledge (*fard 'ayn*) for someone who gets married. Even those who are not married should familiarise themselves, especially given the current state of affairs in our communities. Sadly, divorces are often uttered spontaneously, accidentally, in a manner that was not pre-meditated, in anger and sometimes even as a joke. In my capacity as a Muslim scholar, I have had to deal with many such instances and the huge social ramifications they carry. This has become a serious issue. Divorce is a thing you cannot play with, for doing so is worse than playing with fire. We must prepare and learn how to protect ourselves by thoroughly acquainting ourselves with how this institution works in Islam.

THE SOCIAL STIGMA OF DIVORCE

In our communities divorce currently carries such a social stigma, that there is huge pressure to try to keep couples together even when they have irreconcilable differences. We need to wake up to the fact that divorce, though a last resort, is nevertheless permissible and sometimes necessary. We must give adequate support to

¹ See 'Aynī, *Umdat al-Qārī*, 20:263; 'Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 9:400; Qārī, *Mirqāt al-Mafātīḥ*, 5:2133.

people who are facing marital problems and not add our own cultural misunderstandings into the mix. The right of the husband and the wife to live dignified lives, and of their children to avoid growing up in an environment of hostility and frustration, far outweighs any feeling of wider family members who think a divorce would reflect badly on them. If your son or daughter is having a difficult time in their marriage, the situation is about them, not about you. Applying social pressure not to divorce even in situations of abuse or serious relationship problems can have catastrophic effects on individuals, particularly children who could grow up scarred and are more likely to end up repeating the patterns of abusive behaviour they witness, and likely to end up divorcing themselves as adults.

Not only this, but if a person does get divorced, current social attitudes ensure that they then face many obstacles in reestablishing themselves. Sometimes their own families may reject or disown them. In less severe situations, they are taken back but live with dismissive or patronising treatment from extended family for the rest of their lives. This is not dignified. Most will face a big struggle in remarrying. This is particularly so for women. There is a huge stigma and assumptions made that if a woman is divorced, this means that she is no good, as if the success of a marriage rests entirely on a woman's shoulders. Such baggage does not always exist for men, who people more often feel sorry for that he had such a poor wife and was forced to divorce. This attitude is blatantly unjust. It is also a sad irony that women should be the ones to find it more difficult to remarry after divorce, as they are more likely to need support following a separation. She may not previously have had an occupation by which she could now support herself, and often there may be dependent children in her custody.

Divorce is not something to be celebrated, but it is a fact of life, and many male and female companions were divorced or widowed, and for them to remarry was commonplace. It was not even unusual for a woman to receive a proposal immediately following a divorce during her *'idda* (waiting period), such that the Qur'an discouraged any explicit and firm proposals during it:

﴿وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا عَرَّضْتُمْ بِهِ مِنْ خِطْبَةِ النِّسَاءِ أَوْ أَكْنَنْتُمْ فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ عَلِيمَ اللَّهِ أَنَّكُمْ سَتَذَكَّرُوهُنَّ وَلَكِنْ لَا تُؤَاعِدُوهُنَّ سِرًّا إِلَّا أَنْ تَقُولُوا قَوْلًا مَعْرُوفًا وَلَا تَعْزِمُوا عُقْدَةَ النِّكَاحِ حَتَّى يَبْلُغَ الْكِتَابُ أَجَلَهُ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ﴾

You will not be blamed whether you give a hint that you wish to marry these women, or keep it to yourselves — Allāh knows that you intend to propose to them. Do not make a secret arrangement with them; speak to them honourably and do not confirm the marriage tie until the prescribed period reaches its end. Remember that Allāh knows what is in your souls, so be mindful of Him. Remember that Allāh is most forgiving and forbearing (Baqara, 2:235).

Nowadays, if someone is divorced, they are often seen as damaged goods, and nobody will come near. One young Muslim woman born and brought up in the UK was pressured by her extended family to marry a cousin from "back home." Although the marriage was officiated, she had fundamental issues with compatibility and refused to move to live with him and never spent time alone with him. After some time, the parents relented and a divorce took place. Now, despite still being young, well-educated and religiously observant, she still has a really hard time finding a marriage partner. Any mention of the previous marriage sends everyone running, even though she never even lived with her husband. These sorts of examples are too numerous to count.

It is truly pitiful that there are so many unmarried Muslim men and women. It is only by helping people to marry, helping them to learn their religion and helping to establish strong families that we will be able to move forward as a community. We must act to facilitate this by developing a sound understanding of the Islamic worldview, of healthy relationships, human psychology, the realities of mental illness, emotional wellbeing, abusive behaviour and the role of counselling and other such issues that have been neglected for far too long. We must strive to make marriage easier for people, and a

people who are facing marital problems and not add our own cultural misunderstandings into the mix. The right of the husband and the wife to live dignified lives, and of their children to avoid growing up in an environment of hostility and frustration, far outweighs any feeling of wider family members who think a divorce would reflect badly on them. If your son or daughter is having a difficult time in their marriage, the situation is about them, not about you. Applying social pressure not to divorce even in situations of abuse or serious relationship problems can have catastrophic effects on individuals, particularly children who could grow up scarred and are more likely to end up repeating the patterns of abusive behaviour they witness, and likely to end up divorcing themselves as adults.

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key part of this is to eliminate the stigma surrounding divorce. This starts with you. You must take the first step, to be willing yourself to consider someone who is divorced, to suggest someone divorced as a marriage prospect for a friend, or to consider someone divorced as a prospect for your child. Attitudes will only change when people begin to change their behaviour, and when upright members of the community start setting the right example.

THE PAINFUL REALITY OF DIVORCE

A person who is going through a divorce needs support, not judgement. Divorce is no easy thing. At a distance, it is just the dissolution of a marriage, but the reality is usually far more messy. There is great wisdom in the ḥadīth describing divorce as the most detestable of all permissible acts. Divorce has far-reaching consequences beyond simply the living arrangements of a man and a woman. The emotional factors at play and the wider social effects are huge.

Some studies show the negative effects of divorce on both the separating couple and on the children involved. In worst cases, divorce can affect life decisions even decades after it happens. When two people marry and live together, their lives become intimately connected and intertwined, even more so once they have children. Trying to pull them apart is like separating two climbing vines wrapped around each other. It will be extremely difficult and can cause irreparable damage to both sides. They may recover, but they may bear the emotional scars of the separation for the rest of their lives.

Further studies have shown that children of divorced parents are more likely to divorce themselves as adults due to the “sleeping effects” from their parents’ divorce.¹ Their parents, who are their primary role models, were unable to sustain their marriage, which sets an

¹ See <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/heart-the-matter/201408/are-children-divorce-doomed-fail> (accessed 25/10/2018), which also discusses other research showing that it does not have to be the case and children from such marriage can make

unhealthy precedent. This is true not only of the children. Divorce also wears down the moral commitment of society in general. It is all the easier for someone to say, “Well So-and-so got divorced, it can’t be so bad. I’m not going to sit around and put up with my rocky marriage!”

Having said this, I want to emphatically discourage people from overgeneralising this and assuming all young people from broken families will be unsuitable partners for marriage. We may all know several people from divorced parents who have stable relationships.

Children, depending on their age at the time of their parents’ marital problems and divorce, also experience a degree of confusion and an unclear picture of what constitutes a “normal” family situation. Allāh Most High has made the natural state of humans such that a man and woman marry and raise a family together. Now, due to the ever-increasing rates of divorce, there is a huge number of “blended” families consisting of step-parents, step-siblings, half siblings, and many sets of grandparents, uncles and aunts. Such arrangements can become confusing, not only due to the arising of *maḥram* segregation issues, but also due to the potential for favouritism or sibling rivalry between stepchildren and one’s own children. There have also been cases of abuse taking place in these sorts of arrangements. Though there are many examples of step-parents doing a good job of parenting and creating a stable environment for the children of a divorce, often the mix of new family members, feelings of confused loyalties and unsettling custody and living arrangements can have a deep impact on the emotional welfare of children.

When there are children involved in a marriage, divorce has been described as being like a thousand knives thrown at one’s heart. The issues normally arising in divorce are compounded, even if the children are only infants. When there are no children, and especially if the marriage has been short, it is easier to get away with a relatively clean separation. For this reason, a couple with children should

their own choices too. See also, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/kids-and-divorce-_n_5730980 (accessed 25/10/2018).

think very carefully about whether they truly have exhausted every possible avenue to sustain their marriage. If for example, a divorce is on the cards due to wider family pressures, but you know that your spouse is good to you and your children, you should keep the marriage together. However, there will inevitably be cases in which separation would be the better option, not only for the couple but also for the children.

PARENTS ASKING YOU TO DIVORCE

If parents or other family members do not like your wife and ask you to divorce her, you are not obliged to do so. As long as you have a healthy relationship and she fulfils your rights and those of your children, there is harm in divorcing her even if she does not get along with other members of your family. The following incident helps put this in better perspective. Someone came to Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) and said, "My father has ordered me to divorce my wife." He replied, "Don't divorce her." So the person said, "Didn't 'Umar   order his son 'Abdullāh to divorce his wife?" Imām Aḥmad replied, "[Not] until your father becomes like 'Umar," that is, do not divorce her on his instruction until he becomes like 'Umar   in striving for truth and justice and not possessing any selfish motivation in this regard (*Al-Mawsū'a al-Fiqhiyya al-Kuwaytiyya*, 8:71).

AVOIDING DIVORCE

Given the gravity of divorce, we cannot limit our discussion to its effects, rather we must try to discuss divorce in such a way that helps couples avoid it in the first place. Those preparing to marry or in currently happy marriages should actively safeguard themselves, while those who are going through a rocky period in their marriage should do their utmost to salvage their relationship and to avoid divorce. I would like to provide some guidance here from my expe-

periences of meeting divorcees and people who are going through a divorce, to give some concrete suggestions for how we can avoid the same mistakes. Actively avoiding divorce can be broken down into three broad areas:

- Actively working on one's marriage and dealing promptly and effectively with problems (this has been discussed in previous chapters);
- Removing "divorce" completely from one's vocabulary;
- Learning to control one's anger.

DIVORCE SHOULD NOT BE IN YOUR VOCABULARY

It is quite common and normal for conflicts, small or large, to arise over the course of one's marriage. The key is never to let divorce be an option or even a word in your vocabulary.

Divorce is the last resort and is not something that should be thrown around, even if one does not mean it. These days, it is taken lightly, and divorces are often issued on the flimsiest of excuses or used as a threat to emotionally blackmail a spouse. Imagine being in a marriage where you are constantly treading on eggshells and living in terror, because you do not know if what you may say or do will cause your spouse to threaten to say or ask for the "D" word?

Muslims should know how delicate this matter is and how easy it is to issue a divorce. Ignorance is rife in this regard. Divorce is one of three categories of statements in Islam, which, whether said intentionally or by accident, even as a joke, is legally effective. The only exception may be if someone is not of sound mind (i.e., clinically insane), and does not know and cannot even remember what they say. Simply being angry and saying something in the heat of the moment does not cut it as an excuse. In fact, divorce is generally given in anger and not over a cup of tea. Even if a wife asks her husband for a divorce during an argument and he says "You have it" a divorce would be effected. Similarly, if the husband says "I divorce

you” or “You are divorced,” then it is done. This is why the word divorce should be completely removed from your active vocabulary so that it is not inadvertently issued without a great deal of thought.

There was a couple I dealt with. They were both learning Arabic and one day they were sitting together and the husband decided to practice some phrases on his wife. Of all things, the husband decided to practice saying “*Anti ṭāliq*” (“You are divorced”). Could he not have found something else, *anything* else, to practise on her, like “*anti ḥabibati*” (“you are my beloved”)? This is surely an act of Satan playing with our minds, trying to dissolve a family. May Allāh protect us.

In some cultures, divorce is not something very often mentioned. But there are other cultures where it is spoken about on an almost daily basis. A friend of mine told me that he once visited the house of an acquaintance of his. My friend was offered some food but kindly refused because he had already eaten. The person insisted, but my friend again refused. The host then exclaimed, “If you don’t eat, my wife is divorced!” The poor wife had not done anything wrong. Why should she deserve to be treated with such appallingly reckless behaviour? In fact, she had probably cooked the food, and now she was on the verge of a divorce because of it. One can only imagine what she must have been going through if she had heard the exchange. In this particular culture, this may just be considered a casual kind of statement to make and it would not be surprising if she had even gotten used to it. Fortunately my friend was gracious and accepted the invitation to eat, thus preventing the host from breaking his oath and his wife being divorced. But what if the guest were stubborn? What if he were to say “I don’t care” and simply walk out? The host would have had to chase him down for the rest of his life to keep his marriage intact. This behaviour is a casual form of abuse that has to be discussed and tackled. Thankfully not all cultures are like this.

This kind of divorce talk is not unique to our current situation. In a story thought to have taken place in the time of Imām Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), a man said to his wife, “You are divorced if I cannot find any act of worship that nobody else is doing at the same time

in the entire world.” How on earth did he come up with that? It is almost as if he had been sitting around thinking of the most inventive way to play with divorce. He later came to regret his statement. He looked for a *fatwā* and asked many scholars for a legal solution to save his marriage. Each time they told him that there was nothing he could do, that it would be impossible. If it were prayer, there is always someone somewhere praying. If it is calling the *adhān*, at any given time there is probably someone in the world calling the *adhān*. Eventually he came to consult Imām Abū Ḥanīfa, who advised him to go to the Masjid Ḥarām in Makkah and to do a *ṭawāf* all alone when no one else was doing it. At that time there were fewer people doing *ṭawāf* around the Ka’ba, unlike today, when there is nearly always a rush. So for him to do it alone was possible. And so this foolish man managed to escape the consequences of his words, or so the story goes.

One can understand from these examples that throwing around and abusing the word divorce is generally a cultural thing, which should not be happening. At the same time, it is not only men who are guilty in taking divorce lightly. There have been too many stories that have come to me where the wife is constantly asking for a divorce. Any small issue arises and she will ask for a divorce, even though she does not really want a divorce. She is just using this as a way to pressure her husband and thereby playing with fire. This constant mentioning of divorce whether by the husband or the wife, even when mentioned insincerely, will over time have a psychological impact and tear down any good feeling in the relationship, and the word will eventually slip out. That dangerous word should not be toyed with at all.

So whether intended or by accident, in anger or in jest, statements of divorce carry legal weight. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Three things, whether undertaken seriously or in jest, are treated as serious: Marriage, divorce and revocation”¹ (*Abū Dāwūd*, 2194; *Tirmidhī*, 1184). So if someone conducts a play marriage, utters a divorce in

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jest, or jokingly revokes his wife after a divorce, they will all become legally valid. This is because they are serious undertakings that the Shari'a does not want people to take lightly due to the harm that comes from their abuse. Every person reading this should make an active commitment that, for the sake of the sanctity of their marriage, they will eliminate the word divorce from their everyday vocabulary. When the threat of divorce is removed from the marital equation, there is a trust between the spouses that they are both committed to making things work, whatever happens, rather than resorting to threats of divorce as the easy option to shut down the spouse and win an argument. This is a crucial step in working to avoid divorce. If all avenues have been exhausted and a divorce is deemed necessary, this will be the time to rationally, in a calm and appropriate manner, issue the divorce.

DIVORCE AND ANGER

As we have just seen, uttering a statement of divorce while one is angry does not nullify the divorce. It nullifies the marriage. People do not generally give a divorce when they are happy? Taming one's anger is thus another key step in avoiding marital conflicts and the possibility of divorce.

Regardless of one's marital status, the struggle of a believer concerns the purification of the heart from spiritual diseases and working on one's moral rectification. Good character is attained through tuning and balancing one's inner faculties and striving for attributes that align one with the *fitra*, the natural disposition of the human being. This balance and perfection we seek is demonstrated to us in the example of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ. Anger is a natural human emotion and faculty, and it is one that is to be kept in balance. In fact, if one were to eliminate the faculty of anger, they would be considered a coward and would most likely not be able to fulfil certain rights due upon them from other people. However, exceeding the bounds in anger can lead a person to transgress the

boundaries of Allāh and to mistreat others. The Prophet ﷺ never got angry except if the commandments of Allāh had been violated. He advised sternly against anger. A man once came to him and said, "Give me advice." The Prophet ﷺ replied, "Do not get angry." The man asked repeatedly and the Prophet ﷺ answered each time, "Do not get angry" (*Bukhārī*, 116).

When the various human faculties are kept in moderation, this will manifest itself as good character in a person. If one does become angry, it should always be for the sake of Allāh and not to satisfy one's own ego or self-interest.

An outward manifestation of untamed anger is seen in a person's use of vulgar language. There are some people who, no matter what they are talking about, habitually pepper their sentences with expletives, as they find themselves unable to avoid using these words. This is a disturbing habit ingrained in some due to the influence of certain segments of culture. For most other people, swearing is something they would never do in normal conversation. However, even for someone otherwise considered a decent person, it can come out unexpectedly at times of anger and frustration, when you are alone or when at home with your guard down. Maybe somebody cuts you off while driving or you lose your cool at the peak of a particularly heated argument. Others who see only the parts of you that you choose to present to the outside world would be shocked to hear this from you. But when in a state of anger, something takes hold and the ugliest parts of your character come to the surface.

Why does this happen? The reality is that the use of bad language is very similar to the issuing of divorce in a state of anger. When a person feels that they are losing control of a situation, that they are trapped, vulnerable or that their ego has been slighted, the anger of the *nafs*, the lower self, rises to the surface. If in the heat of anger they are unable to think clearly of a positive solution, they will reach down to a base level to find a way to assert their dominance and satisfy their ego. They will try to overcome their own feelings of doubt, embarrassment, frustration or inadequacy by attempting to raise themselves up or put down the other person, which can

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manifest itself as swearing, issuing threats (of divorce or otherwise) or as physical violence.

Although this sort of behaviour generally pertains to men, women are not immune to problems in managing anger. However, in the context of divorce, it is normally men who will cause the greater problem. A man who is unable to control his anger may exploit his position as the leader of the family to assert his dominance through threats, as he is the one in a position to issue a divorce. A woman too may find anger rising to the surface as a manifestation of an underlying frustration at her position of relative vulnerability. In both cases, men and women who are unable to tame their anger would be advised to attend a course or counselling sessions on anger management. If we find ourselves falling into such behaviour and unable to control ourselves, we should make *du'ā'* to Allāh to protect us even from our own selves:

اَللّٰهُمَّ لَا تَكِلْنِيْ اِلَى نَفْسِيْ طَرَفَةً عَيْنٍ

[Allāhumma] lā takilnī ilā nafsī ṭarfata 'ayn,

[O Allāh,] do not leave me to myself even for a blink of an eye
(*Musnad al-Bazzār*, 6368).

In this *du'ā'* we ask Allāh that we do not become subjugated by the lower self (*nafs*), which may incite us to do wrong in association with the influence of Satan. We ask Allāh to take care of our matter, to take control of ourselves such that we are not swayed by our base inclinations and thus fall into error.

Another supplication that is very useful, especially when you approach someone with whom you normally end up having some altercation or squabble, is as follows:

اَللّٰهُمَّ اِنِّیْ اَعُوْذُ بِكَ مِنَ الشِّقَاقِ وَالتَّقَاقِ وَسُوْءِ الْاَخْلَاقِ

Allāhumma innī a-ʿūdhu bika min ash-shiqāqi wa 'n-nifāqi wa sū'i l-akhlāq,

O Allāh, I seek your refuge from dispute, hypocrisy and evil character (*Abū Dāwūd*, 1546; *Nasā'i*, 5471).

THE BASIC FIQH OF DIVORCE

Once when travelling to deliver a religious program, I was driven back to the airport by a person who had attended the talk. I asked him if he was married. He said that he had been but, due to issues of incompatibility and simply not being able to get on with their life, he had divorced on good terms from his ex-wife. It still seemed to me from the way he was speaking about her that there was some affection and love present. Out of concern I asked him how many divorces he had given, and when he said he had given one I smiled and told him that then it would be fine if he wanted to get married to her again. I was happy that here was someone who had played it right and gone with the recommended option of a single divorce. However, he suddenly looked concerned and asked, "Do I need to give more?" He seemed to have gotten the impression from my discussion that without giving three divorces, their divorce had not been finalised and they were still married.

These misunderstandings are common. Because there is some misunderstanding about the status of three divorces in one, one in three, the three levels of divorce, etc., and the various *fiqh* rulings pertaining to them, it seems to have subconsciously entered the minds of a lot of laypeople that pronouncing three divorces is the only way to go. This is a serious misconception. I cannot emphasis this enough. One divorce will certainly do the job for you; it is powerful enough, but people seem to want to give three for whatever reason. This common misunderstanding is not only incorrect but it can in fact have devastating consequences. If for example one had a very potent pill or tablet, and then decided to take three instead of the prescribed one, what would happen? The result could be deadly. Obviously, divorce is a very different thing, but everyone should be fully aware that one divorce is more than sufficient to end a marriage. An excuse I hear all too often from people who are guilty of uttering three divorces altogether is "I am not very practising or knowledgeable about Islam," and so they did not know. My question to them is why they did not give one, ten, a hundred or some other random number of divorces

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then. Why the accursed three at once? The problem is clearly that the common understanding has become this at the grassroots level and needs to be corrected.

Three divorces are considered a point of no return. It is not permissible for a woman who has been given three divorces to remarry the same husband. The only way this prohibition is lifted is if she marries another man first, consummates the marriage with him and then somehow gets divorced from him. Only then can she lawfully remarry her initial husband. It is mentioned in a narration that a man came to the companion ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās ؓ saying that he had given his wife a hundred divorces and asking what should he do. Ibn ‘Abbās ؓ responded, “She has been divorced from you by three pronouncements, and by the other ninety-seven you have mocked the verses of Allāh” (Mālik, *Muwatta’*, 2:550).

This is a very delicate issue, and we should take great care. With regard to the Islamic rulings, as we will now see, pronouncing three divorces as opposed to one can be destructive, particularly if they were uttered in a state of anger, as a joke or if a husband and wife later come to regret their decision to divorce and want to reconcile. Familiarising ourselves with the rulings of divorce is thus paramount.

Not to get into too many technicalities I will try to make the following discussion as simple as possible. The basic *fiqh* of divorce is absolutely crucial to help you navigate your way through the challenges of marriage.

The Words of Divorce

Any married man has the option to divorce his wife up to three times before he loses the right to be married to her. Since divorce is an articulation by the husband to annul his marriage, he may do this using any words he wants. As such there are no formal or specific terms that he must use. However, there are certain guidelines by which his utterances will be assessed to determine their validity as a divorce. Let me discuss them here.

One of the most fundamental criteria is that his statement be in

the past or present tense to demonstrate that he is serious and has indeed divorced her. Any statement in the future tense, such as “I am going to divorce you” or “You will be divorced,” will therefore not count as a divorce since it lacks certainty.

As people do not always use clear and direct terms to articulate their thoughts, a husband’s expression of divorce can also either be clear, direct and explicit (*ṣarīḥ*), such as “I have divorced you” and “You are divorced,” or it can be indirect and figurative (*kināya*), such as (a) “Get out of here,” (b) “You are nothing” and (c) “You are free.” While there is no doubt that a divorce occurs for certain when he uses the direct expressions, there is always a doubt when he uses a figurative expression. Did he mean by (a) that she has left the marriage, or with (b) and (c) that she can consider herself to be nothing or free because he is no longer her husband, or is he asking her with (a) to leave because he just wants time to himself, or with (b) that she has no value, and with (c) that he will no longer place restrictions on her about anything?

To determine whether a figurative expression was intended as a divorce requires an accompanying intention from the husband or circumstantial evidence. As such, if the husband were to pronounce a figurative expression of divorce in anger or in the midst of discussing divorce with his wife, and this were to be brought to court, a judge could rule that his marriage is annulled going by the circumstantial evidence (known as *qaḍā’an*, or “legally binding”), even if the husband claimed he had no intention of divorcing his wife. However, if it is not taken to court and the husband is absolutely sure that he had no intention of divorcing his wife with such figurative statements, but intended another meaning within the scope of their signification, his marriage would morally remain valid between him and Allāh (known as *diyānatan*).

There are many examples of figurative statements of divorce, such as “We are finished,” “You are separated,” “You are on your own,” “Get out,” or “Go back to your parents.” In such cases a *ṭalāq bā’in* (irrevocable divorce) may occur depending on whether it was

accompanied by intention, they were uttered in the context of divorce or said in anger.

The Three Categories of Figurative Statements and their Contexts

The jurists have classified figurative expressions into three categories. (1) Those that can be used as obliging terms only, meaning for granting a request of divorce. (2) Those that have a dual usage: either as obliging terms or terms to show rejection of a divorce. (3) Those that have a dual usage: either as obliging terms or terms to hurl an insult.

Then the context in which such terms may be said are also three: (1) during a state of anger, (2) during a divorce discussion, or (3) during a neutral state. Whether or not an allusive statement amounts to a divorce and whether intention of divorce is needed strongly depends on which of the three contexts it is uttered in. In some situations, it will amount to a divorce even without an intention, while in others an intention will be required. This is from the judicial perspective, as from a personal perspective a person only needs to look at his intention.

It can be overwhelming to get your head around all these rules and possible scenarios. So here is a cheat sheet to help us all. It shows the situations in which intention is needed for a divorce to occur and those in which it occurs by default even without intention. Figurative terms are nearly always dependent on the customary usage of a particular place and time and are open to interpretation, and thus can change. The most common terms have been categorised below to the best of my understanding and are presented so that they be avoided. Familiarise yourself with the terms so you can avoid misusing them. Terms specific to American English are marked with (US) in parentheses. Ignore the rest of the chart if you wish, but ensure you consult a good scholar if any of the scenarios arise. My main objective of presenting this entire discussion in this depth and detail here is to demonstrate the delicateness of the matter, and how even insinuations of divorce can be dangerous for a couple.

	Neutral	Anger	Divorce Discussion
Statements of obliging or rejection			
Get out, Get out of here, Get lost, Go, Leave, Disappear, Exit, Move from here, Cover yourself up, Put your <i>hijab</i> on, I never want to see you, I never want to see your face (US), Get out of my face (US), Scram (US)	Intention needed	Intention needed	Intention needed
Statements of obliging or insult			
Loner, You are nothing, You are separated, You're done (US), You're through (US).	Intention needed	Intention needed	Divorce by default
Statements of obliging only			
We are finished, You are a free woman, I have freed you, You are on your own, You are released, Do your <i>'idda</i> , I have released you, I am separated from you, We're through (US), It's over (US).	Intention needed	Divorce by default	Divorce by default

Now that we have grasped the two types of expression people may use, the explicit and the figurative, we can discuss their effects on the marriage. What type of divorce will result through such expressions? While there is a lot of detail here in the books of jurisprudence, broadly speaking the clear and direct (*ṣariḥ*) expressions will result in a revocable divorce (*ṭalāq raj'ī*) and the allusive expressions will nearly always result in an irrevocable divorce (*ṭalāq bā'in*).

The Revocable Divorce

Let us take the revocable divorce first as it is the more common one. As the name suggests, it is a divorce that can be revoked with relative ease, while the irrevocable cannot be revoked. When a wife is given a revocable divorce, she enters into the state of *'idda*, or the "waiting

period," which lasts for three complete menstrual cycles. During this time, she cannot marry anyone else, as the marriage remains in a state of suspension until the *'idda* period is over. During this time the couple still stay in the same house (she is not to leave the house) and the husband will continue to provide financially for her, though they are not to act like husband and wife or be intimate with each other. The *'idda* serves as a cooling-off period, providing them an opportunity to figure out their problems and possibly reconcile.

It is often the case that one of the couple will at this point want to get back together while the other does not. So he or she will try to persuade the other to reconcile. The husband has the discretion to revoke the divorce at any time during the *'idda* period by either a verbal statement of revocation (*raj'a*), such as "I take you back," or (though undesirable) through any intimate act such as a sensual touch, kiss or sexual intercourse. To help him, the wife is encouraged to adorn herself and make herself attractive for him. If he takes her back within the *'idda* period, their marriage is automatically reinstated and there is no need for another *nikāḥ*. On the other hand, if the *'idda* elapses without reconciliation, the divorce becomes final and the couple are considered fully divorced (*bā'in*). If they wish to remarry, a new *nikāḥ* with all of its conditions will be required.

The Irrevocable Divorce

Now let us take the irrevocable divorce (*ṭalāq bā'in*). As the name suggests, it is a divorce that cannot be revoked. It is the divorce that normally results from figurative expressions, but it can also result from a more intense or emphatic form of direct statement, e.g., "You are irrevocably divorced." The wife in this case begins her *'idda* and the same rules apply, that she cannot leave the house or marry anyone else until three complete menstrual cycles are over. However, in this case their marriage is already annulled (*bā'in*), and while the husband is still responsible for her expenses, he cannot revoke her at his discretion. If they wish to reconcile, a new *nikāḥ* with all of its conditions will be required whether during the *'idda* period or after it. Additionally, she will observe *ḥijāb* from him and

avoid any adornment or makeup (see section on "the waiting period" below). Any type of intimacy is unlawful between them as they are now technically strangers to each other.

So the main difference from the revocable divorce is that the discretion he had to revoke her without a fresh *nikāḥ* is no longer available, as the divorce is final (*bā'in*) due to the expression he used to effect it. In addition, one of the potential benefits for the wife in this type of divorce is that he cannot revoke her against her wishes during the *'idda* period. He requires her consent to reconcile. All of the above explanation applies up to two divorces, whether the second is given together with the first or they are given separately. The couple may get back together in the ways mentioned above as long as a third divorce is not pronounced. Allāh says,

﴿الطَّلَاقُ مَرَّتَانٍ فَإِمْسَاكَ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيحٌ بِإِحْسَانٍ﴾

Divorce can happen twice, and [each time wives] either be kept on in an acceptable manner or released in a good way (Baqara, 2:229).

The Third and Final Divorce

If after two divorces the husband utters another divorce, whether explicit or figurative, the final divorce takes place. It is now a point of no return. This stage of divorce is indicated in the following verse. Allāh Most High says,

﴿إِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا تَحِلُّ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ حَتَّى تَنْكِحَ زَوْجًا غَيْرَهُ فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا أَنْ يَتَرَاجَعَا إِنْ ظَنَّا أَنْ يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ ۚ وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ يُبَيِّنُهَا لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

If a husband divorces his wife [after the second divorce], she will not be lawful for him until she has taken another husband. And should he divorce her, there will be no blame if she and the first husband return to one another, provided they feel that they can keep within the bounds set by Allāh. These are Allāh's bounds, which He makes clear for those who know (Baqara, 2:230).

This means that after the third divorce, a woman will be permanently separated from her husband and she will not be permitted

to marry him again unless she marries another man, consummates the marriage with him (this is a condition), and is then divorced by him for some reason. Only then would it be permissible for her to remarry the first husband, and his option for three divorces would also be restored in this case. This process is known as *ḥalāla*. What the chances are of this happening and her getting back with the first husband is anyone's guess.

The *ḥalāla* cannot be pre-conditioned; that means the woman cannot marry another man on the condition that he divorce her after consummation of the marriage, so that she may return to her first husband. If this is pre-conditioned, it will be *ḥarām* and the parties involved will be divinely accursed according to the prophetic ḥadīth: "Allāh has cursed the one who makes lawful and the one for whom she is made lawful" (*Abū Dāwūd*, 2076; *Tirmidhī*, 1119), that is, both the second and the first husband respectively. While it is unlawful and an act of sin to undertake such a stratagem, a woman would technically become lawful for her first husband after she has completed her *ʿidda* from the second husband.

While the Qurʾān does not mention the condition of consummation in this, we learn of it from the ḥadīths. During the time of the Prophet ﷺ a companion named Rifāʿa al-Qurazī divorced his wife thrice, and she went onto marry ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Zabir. But she came to the Prophet ﷺ complaining about her new husband, stating that he possessed only what could be described as the fringe of a cloth (suggesting that he had erectile dysfunction), expressing this by holding the edge of her outer garment. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ smiled at this and said, "Perhaps you want to return to Rifāʿa, but you cannot, not until he [the current husband] has tasted your honey (*ʿusayla*) and you have tasted his honey" (*Bukhārī*, 5260; *Muslim*, 1433), meaning, you must consummate the marriage with him.

There is wisdom in barring a thrice divorced couple from getting back together so easily. Placing a limit on the number of times a couple can divorce and reconcile is to prevent people making a mockery of the whole thing. A husband, constantly divorcing and taking

back his wife, could be using this as a form of abuse, and so if she is given the opportunity to marry someone else, she can see for herself what a new, potentially healthier marital relationship could be like.

I have heard of several cases where the *ḥalāla* process has not turned out as originally anticipated. A divorcee married a new husband with the understanding that he would divorce her so that she may return to her first husband. While there was no express condition, it was implied. After the marriage, he refused to divorce her, and they ended up making a life together. She actually confessed to being somewhat happier in this marriage than the one to which she had hoped to return. On the flip side, there are also the unscrupulous *ḥalāla* "service providers" I have been informed about who make money by providing an in-and-out drive-through pre-conditioned *ḥalāla* service. They exploit the vulnerabilities of couples who have fallen into the third divorce predicament and are destroying their own dignity while also invoking the wrath of Allāh.

It cannot be emphasised enough that a couple should think long and hard about their relationship and about divorcing multiple times, so they do not find themselves in this predicament of having to ever consider a *ḥalāla*. All too often, whether due to ignorance or anger, some men issue all three divorces at once, as if only three will work and that any less is not effective. What if they then want to reconcile once emotions have calmed down? They nearly always do. Imagine having to go through the process of *ḥalāla* and putting the woman you love through it. This is a word of warning to men specifically as they are the ones guilty of issuing all three divorces at once. They abuse the discretion granted to them. Even if divorce is the only way forward, then a single divorce is more than sufficient. It will provide the desired effect. Why give more and regret it?

My final request on this is that, once you have read this discussion, you take it upon yourself to inform at least ten people from among your family and friends about the efficacy of a single divorce, and that three divorces at once is a no-no. If you can save at least one couple from grief you will be handsomely rewarded by the Divine.

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THE "THREE EQUALS ONE" ISSUE

There is a great deal of controversy regarding the validity of issuing multiple divorces at once, which partly explains the confusion among those who are less learned in the *fiqh* of these matters. There are a number of *fatwās* out there indicating that to state three divorces in one go only amounts to one divorce. One of the main sources of this narrative is the very popular *fiqh* manual called *Fiqh al-Sunna* of the Egyptian scholar Sayyid Sābiq (d. 1420/2000). Historically speaking, it has been shown that the first person to give a *fatwā* that three divorces uttered together only amount to one is Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya's grandfather Majd Abū 'l-Barakāt (d. 652/1254), who the former claimed only gave a private *fatwā* on the issue. The first to then give this ruling publicly was Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) himself. Otherwise, a consensus is found that three divorces at once were held as three according to nearly all Sunnī scholarship, including Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) and his followers, at least up to Ibn Taymiyya's time.¹ Since then, however, a number of others have adopted his position. Though one may find this opinion of "three equals one" proliferated on the internet and other places, the overwhelming majority opinion and the agreement of all four authoritative schools of Islamic law is that three divorces issued at once count as three. Even if the three slip out in a state of normal anger, they will be binding as permanently irrevocable divorces, with potentially devastating consequences for a couple who did not really want to divorce.

In a case such as this, even if a person desperately wishes to find themselves a *fatwā* to say that the three only counted as one divorce, and they wish to remain married to their spouse without going through *ḥalāla*, they would easily find such a *fatwā*. They are available. However, they will not feel comfortable due to it being against the overwhelming majority of scholarship throughout the centuries, and they will not in this life be able to receive assurance from Allāh

¹ See Al-Matroudi, *The Hanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah: Conflict Or Conciliation*, pp. 177–181.

that the aberrant ruling they have taken is valid. It behoves one, then, especially in the case of marriage, to adhere to the overwhelming majority and the more cautious opinion and avoid the possibility of being in a state of *zinā*. To do otherwise will risk a person finding themselves in a position of sin for a long time.

When a man and woman marry and join together as a couple for the sake of Allāh, they must take care to do it in a cautious way to make sure that offspring that come from their union are *ḥalāl* and rightful. To be living in a sinful situation can be devastating for one's faith, as there will be no *baraka* in one's life. How many a case has come to me of three divorces, where upon inquiry it is found that it is not the first time it has taken place. Just within the last few months of writing this, a case in which the husband had uttered three divorces together just over two years ago, but remained with his wife based on a *fatwā* received, did it again a year or so later and then a third time recently. I can recall at least two other recent cases, and many more over the last two decades, in which divorce had almost become a habit. In some cases, it had become a recurring theme and hastily dismissed under the feeble excuse that "I did not really mean it." In many of these cases, the wife was not convinced at all and harboured deep feelings of no longer being in a lawful relationship. Thus, to safeguard one's marriage requires an attitude of caution, and of avoiding uttering divorce words, especially three at once, like the plague.

Divorce during Menstruation and Pregnancy

Another misconception that should be clarified here is regarding the validity of divorce while the wife is on her period. Divorcing at this time is highly reprehensible and unlawful. However, there is an agreement among the past scholars and the four schools of thought that comprise the overwhelming majority of the umma, that such a pronouncement will be effective and valid, even though the husband will be sinful for it. The opinion that a pronouncement during her menstruation will not be effective at all has been espoused by Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn Qayyim (d. 751/1350). The majority

opinion is based on an incident reported by Imām Bukhārī that Ibn ‘Umar ؓ divorced his wife during her menses. His father ‘Umar ؓ asked the Prophet ﷺ about this, and he ordered that he take her back into the marriage, then remain with her and only later divorce her if he wanted to during a purity in which they have not had sexual intercourse. Imām Muslim quotes that his divorce was counted (*Muslim*, 1471). Similarly, Imām Bukhārī (5252-3) transmits from Ibn ‘Umar ؓ an explicit statement where he says, “It was counted as a divorce from me.”

Finally, a divorce during the wife’s pregnancy is permissible and valid according to all. Hence, a report on the above incident ends with the Prophet ﷺ advising as follows, “He should then divorce her while she is pure or pregnant” (*Muslim*, 1471).

THE KHUL‘

Islam also provides an avenue for a woman to instigate a divorce through the process of *khul‘*. This is when the wife agrees with her husband to return her marriage gift (*mahr*) or another sum of money in exchange for an irrevocable divorce. Of course, this is done through mutual negotiation, and the husband has to agree to issue the divorce for the agreed sum.

A couple can sometimes run into an impasse in their marriage and their life becomes filled with dispute and enmity. They are no longer able to keep to the obligations and responsibilities placed on them as a married couple by Allāh. In such a case (especially if the husband refuses to divorce unconditionally) the wife has the discretion to seek a divorce by offering a payment. Allāh says,

﴿الطَّلَاقُ مَرَّتَانٍ فَإِمْسَاكَ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيحٌ بِإِحْسَانٍ ۗ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمُ أَنْ تَأْخُذُوا
مِمَّا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ شَيْئًا إِلَّا أَنْ يَخَافَا أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ ۚ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ
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Divorce can happen twice, and [each time] wives either be kept on in an acceptable manner or released in a good way. It is not lawful for you to take back anything that you have given [your wives], except where both fear that they cannot maintain [the marriage] within the bounds set by Allāh: if you [arbiters] suspect that the couple may not be able to do this, there will be no blame on either of them if the woman opts to give something for her release. These are the bounds set by Allāh: do not overstep them. It is those who overstep Allāh’s bounds who are doing wrong (Baqara, 2:229)

We mentioned earlier in the chapter the ḥadīth of the wife of Thābit ibn Qays ؓ, who came to the Prophet ﷺ seeking divorce. She had no complaints about her husband’s faith or character but could not reconcile between being a Muslim and being ungrateful to him. She was unable to appreciate him as a person, as the love and connection simply weren’t there, and this made her uncomfortable as she thought she was compromising her own faith with her lack of appreciation for him. In Islam, the husband and wife are expected to benefit from their relationship and not suffer due to it. Our beloved Prophet ﷺ recognised her dilemma and suggested that she return her *mahr* to her husband and that he grant her a divorce. He did not insist that they stay together.

More often than not, a *khul‘* cannot be mutually arranged between the spouses themselves due to the acrimony between them, and sometimes due to the obstinacy and stubbornness of the husband. Some husbands flat out refuse to divorce their wives, even though at the same time they are not fulfilling their role as a proper husband. This could be because he does still love her and, although he is not willing to change his behaviour, he does not want to let her go. In more difficult situations, some husbands deny a divorce to punish or torture the wife as it prevents her from remarrying. If a husband is unwilling to grant a divorce or to engage in the process of *khul‘* and the wife has sound grounds for separation, she would be advised to seek redress through a Shari‘a court in Muslim countries or through Shari‘a arbitration panels in non-Muslim countries. However, it is

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generally a lengthy process since the judge or panel has to investigate the case and verify that the husband is indeed transgressing the bounds and guilty of oppression before they can annul the marriage. Therefore, if the wife can secure a divorce through family pressure on the husband or some other way, such as a mutually agreed payment, it may be easier and less time consuming.

Islamic law suggests that if the husband is the source of the disharmony and grievance, it is unethical and prohibitively disliked (*makrūh taḥrīmī*), or even unlawful (*ḥarām*) according to some scholars, for him to take any payment in return for the divorce. He should release her with respect as the Qur'ān orders. However, if she is the cause of the problems, he is permitted to take the ransom. Either way, the wife would have to pay if she has no other way out, and he will bear the sins of his ways if he is in the wrong.

THE PARTING GIFT OF GRATIFICATION (*MUT'Ā*) AND FINANCIAL SETTLEMENTS

Allāh says,

﴿وَمَتَّعُوهُنَّ عَلَى الْمَوْسِعِ قَدَرُهُ وَعَلَى الْمُقْتِرِ قَدَرُهُ مَتَّاعًا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾

But bestow on them (a suitable gift), the wealthy according to his means, and the poor according to his means; a gift of a reasonable amount is due from those who wish to do the right thing (Baqara, 2:236).

Even though many divorces lead to acrimony and hatred, they don't all have to end that way. To mitigate this, Islamic law encourages that all divorcees be presented a parting gift of gratification (*mut'ā*), which, at minimum, is a set of clothing. This was generally explained as a chemise (*qamīṣ*, shift or long shirt worn in the home), headscarf and shawl, but in our times any set of clothing that a woman wears when leaving the house, or its value in cash, can be given. A husband can give more if he wants, especially if the wife will be taking care of

the children. The purpose behind it is to assuage some of the feelings of estrangement brought on by the divorce.

Having said that, it is also binding on the wife to avoid any oppressive act on her part, such as denying him child visitation rights (more on this in the custody section) and taking more assets than what is Islamically due to her. A husband is still responsible for the wife's expenses even after divorce, but only until the waiting period is completed. He is then responsible only for the children's expenses and not any unrelated expenses of the wife. However, the laws in some countries automatically allow the wife to take half of her husband's assets and property after a divorce. This does not make it Islamically ethical or lawful. It would be counted as oppressing the husband if she takes more than the share due to her under the Shari'a.

THE WAITING PERIOD (*IDDA*)

Marriage is so sacred and significant that its dissolution results in a waiting period (*idda*). Divorced women must observe the waiting period for three complete menstrual cycles after the divorce. If she is divorced during menstruation, that menstrual cycle will not count; hence, it is prohibitively disliked to divorce during menstruation in order to avoid lengthening her waiting period. Allāh says, "Divorced women must wait for three monthly periods before remarrying" (Baqara, 2:228). If she does not experience any menstruation at all or is menopausal, her waiting period is three months. Allāh says, "...the period of waiting will be three months for those women who have ceased menstruating and for those who have not [yet] menstruated" (Ṭalāq, 65:4). For a widow, the waiting period is four months and ten days. Allāh says, "If any of you die and leave widows, the widows should wait for four months and ten nights before remarrying. When they have completed this set time, you will not be blamed for anything they may reasonably choose to do with themselves. Allāh is fully aware of what you do" (Baqara, 2:234). In either of the above cases, if the woman is pregnant at the time of divorce or death, the

waiting period will end at the delivery of the child. Allāh says, "The waiting period of those who are pregnant will be until they deliver their burden" (Ṭalāq, 65:4).

The waiting period in all types of divorces is generally to be spent in the marital home, even in the case of a third and final divorce. The expenses for this duration are to be undertaken by the husband, except in the case of a widow where she is not due expenses from her husband's estate, though she is entitled to her share of inheritance.

A woman who has been issued a revocable divorce is advised to adorn herself for the husband. However, the irrevocably divorced woman and the widow must abandon any beautification. This is called *iḥdād*. It includes abandoning fragrance, jewellery, silk, henna, oil (even if unperfumed) or makeup to the body, or kohl to the eyes and the like, unless due to a valid reason such as a medical need. Basically, *iḥdād* is to avoid absolutely any kind of adornment or beautification and not appear attractive at all, as any direct proposal is unlawful at this time.

Many benefits and wisdoms have been suggested regarding the waiting period. It is there to exemplify the gravity and sanctity of marriage to both the couple and the community in general. It prevents people from taking marriage to be a light affair. In the case of divorce, the waiting period provides time for reconciliation and reconsideration, and in the case of a widow it acts as an expression of grief on the passing of her husband. Primarily, its main purpose is to provide enough time to demonstrate that the wife is not pregnant with the husband's child, and avoid any confusion over the child's paternity if she were to remarry and get pregnant right away. Hence, the waiting period ends with the delivery of the child if the woman is pregnant when divorced or widowed (even if that be the next day). One might argue that there are quicker ways today to determine that a woman is not pregnant. However, the laws of the Shari'a are meant to be universal and applicable in all places and societies, including where pregnancy and genetic testing is not readily available.

For a widow, this period of mourning spent in the marital home gives time to pause, reflect and withdraw for a while. It helps to

face the reality, brave the darkness, the ache, the loneliness, the anger, the fear, and feeling of being utterly bereft. Sister Naima B. Robert advises,

You must face it because it will break you down, bring you to your knees, make you feel once again that vulnerability of his last days when you would have given anything for one last apology, one last kiss, one last promise. You must face the reality that this is Allāh's plan for you. And that, if this is so, there must be *khayr* in it for you. It's there. It's there in the chance to ask for forgiveness, to pour your heart out, to cleanse, to rectify your soul, to purify your habits, to be ready to emerge from your *'iddah* like a butterfly from a chrysalis: reborn, refashioned, beautiful.¹

Women in the waiting period are required to remain in the home and not leave, except in the case of a widow, who is allowed to leave during daytime to earn a living if required, since her expenses are not due on the husband's estate. She may be able to use any money she receives as her share from her husband's estate as inheritance though.

Finally, from a practical perspective, I generally advise sisters with impending divorces to time it right and receive the inevitable divorce at a time of their choosing if they have such a discretion. This way they may be able to take leave from work (if they are employed) or take the divorce during their children's holidays so they do not have to be dropped off to school, etc., and spend their waiting period properly. If she is unable to take extended leave or faces some other challenges, she should consult a scholar about her particular circumstances.

CUSTODY ISSUES

One of the most destructive consequences of a divorce is the harm done to the children unwittingly by both or one parent. In Western countries, custody laws tend to favour the mother, for which they

¹ <https://muslimmatters.org/2015/08/14/the-gift-of-iddah/> (accessed 6/9/2018).

have come under heavy criticism. It appears that the government in the UK may be looking at overhauling the system, and I hope that it helps to make the situation more balanced.¹ Due to this and other factors, mothers are easily able to alienate their children from their fathers and gain full custody. They can quite easily manipulate the system to their perceived benefit, but in reality to the detriment of all involved. Here are several cases involving just some of the people I know personally:

Case 1: He had not seen his children from his ex-wife for at least fifteen years. He is a scholar from a scholarly family, while his ex-wife's immediate family are also considered very practising and religious people.

Case 2: A well-known scholar who had not seen his two children from his ex-wife for over ten years. His wife is from a practising family. It is only after the children turned eighteen and adults in their own right that they were able to reach out to him themselves, initially without their mother's knowledge.

Case 3: This man and his wife split up and mutually agreed on joint custody of their ten-year-old daughter. Soon the mother started restricting her visits. This forced the father to go to court and the judge ruled on joint custody. The mother then allegedly started to emotionally blackmail the daughter by telling her how lonely she felt when her daughter was staying with the father. She said the father had at least his mother living with him while she had no one. His daughter also informed him that the mother had stopped the car on the way to school and vomited to demonstrate her sickness. Initially, the daughter would tell her father about these things and he noticed how traumatising this was for her. Unfortunately, he could not do much about it. Eventually the daughter became more alienated and reluctant to stay with the father and would always want to be hurried back to her mother's house, eventually refusing to come altogether. The father has now gone back to court and the

¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/divorce-laws-child-custody-parental-alienation-cafcass-mother-father-a8062941.html> (accessed 20/9/2018).

judge appears to have seen through the mother's antics, but the case has not been resolved yet. However, given the complication of the issues, he has reluctantly decided to cease contact at present as that may be in the child's best interest for now.

Similar to this case, another father spent well over twenty thousand pounds and still did not receive custody or the right to see the children. He has had to give up the fight as he is now in debt. He had actually enjoyed reasonable ongoing contact for the initial several years, but the above problems started when he decided to remarry.

Case 4: This separated father, after learning from the experiences of many others, has refused to have anything to do with his son (who was a few months old at the time of the divorce). He has now actively shut both his son and his ex-wife out completely, on account of her alleged controlling behaviour and debilitating conditions placed on him if he wants contact with his child. His thinking was that if he can avoid building a bond with his son, it would be easier for him to deal with any future control and alienating behaviour, which he believed was inevitable. His firm belief was that his ex-wife was trying to use their child to antagonise him, so he shut them both out. While many of his family cannot understand such a move on his part and feel he is neglecting his child, others who are more aware of the details of the story actually sympathise with his approach and agree it may be for the best. Of course, he is more than willing to become part of his child's life if she could facilitate an amicable agreement. He thinks that, by keeping records of everything, it will help to exonerate him in front of his son one day and hopefully help build a relationship then.

I can go on with many more accounts of just the people I know. There are numerous cases of this problem, which has often been called the "malicious-mother syndrome."

What is surprising from the above cases is that many of the mothers are from practising religious families. They don't appear to recognise the oppression inherent in their punishment of their child's father. It is difficult to understand how they justify this and can continue to live with themselves while harming their children

in this way. It appears that their family members are unable to do anything even though they may know that injustice is taking place.

Some psychologists attribute this type of behaviour to narcissism, an intense form of selfishness and self-absorption. Narcissistic people are unable to appreciate other perspectives and tend to be hyperfocused on their own desires and feelings. After divorce, a vendetta besets their heart to destroy the other parent, and the children become convenient weapons in this unholy mission. They give no consideration to their children's best interest; rather, they consider alienation to be the best protection for the children from the perceived evil of the other parent.

Such people are also said to display borderline personality disorder, in which intense emotion becomes expressed as anger. They experience longer bouts of disappointment and distress than healthy people and find it difficult to self-soothe. They end up developing a victim mentality that allows them to blame others and then victimise them.¹ They twist reality and hurl accusations against the other parent. They falsely accuse them of abuse or very commonly interfere with the other's planned parenting times. One mother has been known to tell her children they could not afford food because their father had wasted all their money. In another, a parent repeatedly misinformed the other parent about school activities so that the parent could not participate in the child's school life. They poison the minds of their children to enlist them in their battle. Their ultimate mission is to destroy the other parent's relationship with their children.

However, in this high-stress pursuit for revenge, everyone suffers, not least their children. Though this is most commonly called malicious mother syndrome, both mothers and fathers can be capable of such actions. And in some cases, it is the mothers' immediate family members that are the main offenders and who force her into this behaviour. As she may have nowhere else to go, she succumbs to their pressures.

¹ See <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/resolution-not-conflict/201802/parental-alienation-syndrome-what-is-it-and-who-does-it> (accessed 30/9/2018).

The greatest harm in the long run is no doubt to the children. They can suffer from many issues that hamper development during their most impressionable years, including depression, low self-esteem, trust issues, and an increased risk of substance abuse.¹ Ultimately, growing up in single-parent homes, with hatred burning for your other parent in your heart due to the lies and poisoned narrative fed to you, cannot be very healthy.

Unfortunately, sometimes it is the fathers who are the culprits in the voluntary alienation of their children from themselves. They are given the rights to see their children but refuse to do so due to anger, apathy, self-absorption or some other reason, and absolutely neglect the children.

Parents should therefore make arrangements that are in the best interest of the children in the given circumstances, whether that be the mother or father as the primary caregiver, but with sufficient access for the other.

THE FIQH OF CUSTODIAL RIGHTS

If parents are unable to come to an amicable agreement, what are the Islamic guidelines regarding child custody? Islamic law stipulates that upon separation it is the mother, rather than the father, who is to be the primary custodial parent for the child until the child reaches the age of discernment. There seems to be unanimous agreement between the scholars on this issue (Ibn Qudāma, *Al-Mughnī*, 8:238). This is because the child (whether boy or girl) at this stage needs the kind of compassion and care that normally women can provide. Women also tend to be more patient in dealing with the difficulties involved in early stages of child rearing.

However, if the mother is not present, or there is an impediment to her custody, the custody transfers not to the husband but to other

¹ See Joseph E. Cordell, Huffington Post, October 19, 2014, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/is-your-ex-turning-your-c_b_5691359 (accessed 10/12/2018).

female relatives in the following order: the child's maternal grandmother (mother's mother), then the paternal grandmother (father's mother), then the child's older sister (if any), then the maternal aunt, and then the paternal aunt. Only then does it transfer to male members of the family.

The primary custodial rights of the mother (or any of the above women) is technically forfeited if she marries a man who is unrelated to the child. This is because she could be distracted by her new husband from taking care of her child, as there would be a conflict of interest between the child and the new husband. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ رضي الله عنه narrates that a woman said, "O Messenger of Allāh, this son of mine, my womb was a vessel for him, my breasts a source of drink for him, and my lap a refuge for him, but his father has divorced me and wants to take him away from me. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "You have more right to him so long as you do not remarry" (*Abu Dāwūd*, 2276; *Musnad Aḥmad*, 6707). So a marriage could affect her being the primary custodian, but would not affect her having access to the child.

Other impediments to her custody would be problems with her general character, sanity and being able to fulfil all obligations toward the child. For instance, being constantly out with friends or partying and neglecting the child, or being involved in substance abuse or being an alcoholic are all impediments that could cause her (or any other relative) to lose their primary custodial rights. However, their custody can be restored if the impediment is removed.

The age of discernment refers to when the child becomes more independent in looking after their basic personal needs, such as eating and drinking by themselves, relieving themselves and ensuring their personal hygiene. This has been determined to be around the age of seven in boys and nine in girls (while another view is when they begin menstruating). Women are better placed to teach young girls about women's issues in general and about their personal feminine needs, which become more pertinent after the age of seven. However, beyond these ages of discernment, the son and daughter are to enter into the primary care of the father as they are now in need of

protection, and the boys are also in need of lessons of chivalry and manliness, for which the father is better suited.

Some scholars are of the opinion that a child could be given a choice at this point regarding whom they would like to stay with. However, this has been repudiated by the fact that children at this age are not in the best position to decide, as they are more likely to choose the more lenient parent who would allow them to play and do as they want without discipline.

Notwithstanding the above, if the father is unable to act as the primary carer after the age of discernment, the mother can continue in that role. Regardless of who the primary custodian is at any age, the most important thing is that the other parent cannot be deprived of visiting and being with the children. This point has to be stressed over and over again, as preventing them is a horrible form of child abuse. That is why the primary custodian is restricted in Islamic law from moving the child to any location that would make visits by the other parent unreasonably difficult.

Among other guidance provided by jurists is that the father could be compelled to assume primary custody after the age of discernment if the mother is unable to cope with the child. However, as is the arrangement in most cases today, if the mother wants to continue looking after the children, and the father is content with his visitation rights, this is completely acceptable. The rules are there to settle disputes when they reach a roadblock. Otherwise, people know their situations best and should try to come to an amicable arrangement that, although not pleasing one party or the other, is what is best for the children.

It generally works well when they are both committed to doing the best for their children despite their divorce. The mother looks after the children full time and the father works to earn for their upkeep. In fact, in many cases the mother remarries a stranger and non-kin to her child and he provides guardianship and does not see the child as a competition. The ex-husband may have moved on and remarried and had additional children with his new wife. She may or may not be willing to look after his children from his first wife.

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Therefore, his ex-wife does not necessarily have to lose custody if her new family circumstances allow for the child to be well taken care of, and her ex-husband is satisfied with the arrangement. Of course, if things do not work out, the father possesses the right to become the primary carer.

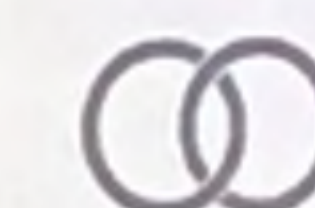
CHILD MAINTENANCE

Moving onto the issue of the children's maintenance costs, it is the obligation of the father according to scholarly consensus. This is whether he is still married to the mother or divorced, and whether the mother is poor or rich. Expenses include clothing, food and shelter among other things. Following a divorce, if the mother has a home to stay in, whether owned by her or her new husband, provided by her family or another person, or provided or paid for by the social system of her country, it would absolve the husband from providing shelter for the child while the child is in her care. Similarly, if the child possesses his or her own assets and property, such as through inheritance, they would be used if the father is unable to provide. Essentially the father would not be forced to provide shelter if a suitable shelter is available. Hence, all things being equal, the mother should not purposely refuse assistance from another legitimate source (such as government welfare schemes) to force the father to take care of the costs, as that may place undue burden on him for no reason. However, if the father's support can provide more suitable housing and other needs for the child than what is available through other resources, she may ask for this.

For the UK, it is important to clarify the Islamic legal status of the various social welfare benefits the government provides to families. Some assume that all such benefits must be saved for the child's future use, while others argue over which parent is more entitled to them. Child Benefit can be described as a tax-free payment aimed at helping parents cope with the cost of bringing up children. It is difficult to find any official guidance on exactly how

this money should be spent, or if the children are to be considered the primary owners of it. Therefore, it is my understanding that it can be spent on general household needs as required for the whole family. Impermissible uses would be for a parent or guardian to use it for other things and deprive the children of the basic essentials of clothing, food, etc.

Similarly, the main purpose of tax credits is to help lower-income families make ends meet, and also intended to lift families out of welfare dependency and incentivise people to work. Whether this works is another question. However, to receive this benefit, families need to meet certain criteria such as number of hours worked. Either way, these benefits are also to be used for general household needs. A parent cannot deprive the rest of their family by diverting the funds for personal use. In one case that was brought to my attention, the husband, whose wife was working while he remained home, had been sending the benefits money overseas to his parents, despite the wife's income not being sufficient to cater for the household expenses including groceries. He insisted that he had a right to send the money abroad because his name was on the claims form. If anything, it is probably the working partner that could have been considered more eligible and not him.





My Lord, build me a house
near You in the Garden
(Dhāriyāt, 51:50).



CONCLUSION

We have finally reached the conclusion of the book after a long but hopefully enlightening journey. Each reader will likely have processed the information in this book in a way suited to his or her circumstances or stage in life. For some their marital journey may have just started or is about to start, and their hope will be that everything *go by the book*. Others may fear that they have gotten off on the wrong foot, while some may have concluded that much or even all their married life has been wasted. However, there will be many, I hope, who are happy with their relationships and may have found advice to enhance them even further. Whatever your experience, let not the journey of marriage intimidate you. Proceed with the right character and frame of mind while seeking assistance from Allāh Almighty. Everything comes from Him.

The Islamic approach to marriage is supposed to be pragmatic. But whatever you do, things can still go wrong. There is always a reason and wisdom behind everything that happens in this world. Even if you have done *istikhāra*, and your choice has been blessed by your *shaykh* or mentor, things can still go wrong. We must not over-spiritualise the situation; your marriage's failure does not necessarily mean you are spiritually defunct or it is because you have sinned. Do not let it depress and debilitate you. It could be just that you made the wrong choice and you were not compatible, or that you did not have the life experience to make it work. However, you can have another chance; maybe with another, or maybe even with the same person.



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Challenges and difficulties can make us better people if we handle them in the right way. Fire does two things. It either burns, destroys and wreaks havoc. Or it cooks the food and bakes the bread that nourishes us. Take the challenges in life as fires that enhance and strengthen us and make us more wholesome, or else they will be fires that destroy us.

Character, respect and trust are probably the most important components needed in a marriage. There is a reason that marriage is half the *din*. It trains you to be very patient, even when difficult; loving, even when you don't feel like it; compromising, even when your ego protests; empathetic, even when it is hard; selfless, even when you don't want to be. All this is hard work and not always easy. However, if we manage to achieve this, we can also get that much closer to Allāh. If marriage were easy, it would not amount to half our faith.

A true believer will strive to fulfil the rights of their spouse and expect reward only from Allāh. On the Day of Judgement, we will be asked about our behaviour, our character and our deeds. The rights and responsibilities many a time may seem a burden, but a marriage is also an act of worship. It can be a means of pleasing Allāh, showing Him gratitude and venerating Him. Ultimately, it is also a test of our *tawakkul* (reliance) on Him. Every marriage will be different. You should work on yours and carve out your own story with your spouse. Strive for *ihsān* and excellence and leave the rest to Allāh.

I want to end this work with a reminder of our final abode. Ultimately, we hope to be in Paradise, and that means we will be with a spouse. Paradise is not Paradise without a spouse. Here then is the Qur'ānic and prophetic depiction of those couples in Paradise who have unlocked the secrets to ultimate bliss.

HUSBAND AND WIFE IN PARADISE

Numerous verses vividly depict husbands and wives being together in a state of perpetual bliss and enjoyment. Allāh says,

﴿أَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ أَنْتُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ تُحْبَرُونَ ۖ يُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِصِحَافٍ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَأَكْوَابٍ وَفِيهَا مَا نَشْتَهِيهِ الْأَنْفُسُ وَتَلَذُّ الْأَعْيُنُ وَأَنْتُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ۚ وَتِلْكَ الْجَنَّةُ الَّتِي أُورِثْتُمُوهَا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

Enter the Garden, you and your wives, delighting in your joy. Dishes and goblets of gold will be passed around them with all that their souls desire and their eyes delight in. There you will remain: "That is the Garden you will inherit for what you did" (Zukhruf, 43:70-72)

Allāh informs people that there will be no hard feelings, hatred, jealousy or rancour in Paradise. It does not matter what anguish or negative feelings existed between them in their worldly life; their hearts will now be cleansed of such feelings to allow them to enjoy the gifts of honour bestowed upon them. Allāh says,

﴿وَنَزَعْنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِنْ غِلٍّ إِخْوَانًا عَلَى سُرُرٍ مُتَقَابِلِينَ ۖ لَا يَمَسُّهُمْ فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَمَا هُمْ مِنْهَا بِمُخْرَجِينَ﴾

And We shall remove any bitterness from their hearts: as brothers, sitting on couches, face to face. No weariness shall befall them therein; nor shall they be expelled therefrom (Hijr, 15:47-48).

He reiterates this again in another verse along with their reaction:

﴿وَنَزَعْنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِنْ غِلٍّ تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهَارُ ۚ وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَنْ هَدَانَا اللَّهُ ۚ لَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلٌ رَبِّنَا بِالْحَقِّ ۚ وَتُودُوا أَنْ تُلَكُمُ الْجَنَّةُ أُورِثْتُمُوهَا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

And We shall remove whatever ill will lies within their breasts. Streams will flow at their feet. And they will say, "Praise be to Allāh, who guided us unto this. We would not have been rightly guided, had Allāh not guided us. The messengers of our Lord certainly brought the truth." And a call will be made unto them, "This is the Garden; you have inherited it on account of your deeds" (Arāf, 7:43).

Upon attaining this honour from Allāh, their excitement and satisfaction will know no bounds:

﴿الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَذْهَبَ عَنَّا الْحَزْنَ ○ إِنَّ رَبَّنَا لَغَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ ○ الَّذِي أَحَلَّنَا دَارَ الْمُقَامَةِ مِن فَضْلِهِ ○ لَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَلَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا لُغُوبٌ﴾

And they will say, "Praise be to Allāh, who has dispelled grief from us. Truly our Lord is forgiving, thankful, He has, in His bounty, settled us in the everlasting home where no toil or fatigue will touch us (Faṭir, 35:34-35).

Allāh then says the following about women in Paradise:

﴿إِنَّا أَنْشَأْنَهُنَّ إِنِشَاءً ○ فَجَعَلْنَاهُنَّ أَبْكَارًا ○ غُرُبًا أَثَرَابًا ○ لِأَصْحَابِ الْيَمِينِ﴾

Truly We brought them into being as a [new] creation, and have made them virgins, amorous to their husbands, matching them in age, for the people of the Right (Wāqī'a, 56:35-38).

It has been related that both men and women will be approximately thirty to thirty-three years old, the optimal age of health and vitality, regardless of what age and state they died in. They will remain at this age forever with their health and strength never diminishing. The women will also have their virginity returned to them, and it will continue to be returned to them each time it is removed. Allāh says,

﴿إِنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ الْيَوْمَ فِي شُغْلٍ فَائِهِونَ ○ هُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُهُمْ فِي ظِلَالٍ عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ مُتَكِبُونَ ○ لَهُمْ فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَلَهُمْ مَا يَدَّعُونَ ○ سَلَامٌ قَوْلًا مِّن رَّبِّ رَحِيمٍ﴾

The people of Paradise today are happily occupied, they and their spouses reclining upon couches in the shade. They will have fruits there and whatever they ask for. "Peace!" A word from a Merciful Lord (Yāsīn, 36:55-58).

Many have interpreted the "occupation" described in the verse to refer to pure lovemaking with full mutual focus and no disturbance, in the most beautiful and unimaginable surroundings.

The prophetic ḥadīths provide further description of people in

Paradise. Mu'adh ibn Jabal رضي الله عنه reports that the Prophet ﷺ said, "The inhabitants of Paradise will enter Paradise hairless and beardless, their eyes anointed with kohl, aged thirty or thirty-three years" (Tirmidhī, 2545).

Another narration expounds on the theme of beauty and spousal satisfaction. Anas ibn Mālik رضي الله عنه reports that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said,

Paradise has a market that they [the inhabitants] will visit each Friday. The northern wind will blow, it will blow onto their faces and clothing, and their beauty and handsomeness will be enhanced. They will return to their spouses enhanced in beauty and handsomeness. Their spouses will remark, "By Allāh, you have increased in beauty and handsomeness after you left us," and they will respond, "By Allāh, you have [also] increased in beauty and handsomeness after you left us (Muslim, 2833).

Each week, their beauty will increase over what they had the week before. This will continue for eternity. The mere thought of such an infinite increase confounds the mind. But we will, God-willing, wait to comprehend this from the experience itself, and spend our time in this world expending our efforts to achieve it.

If a woman had more than one spouse over the course of her life and they all enter Paradise, one opinion is that she will be with the last of them. The Prophetic companion Hudhayfa رضي الله عنه advised his wife thus:

If you want to be my wife in Paradise do not marry anyone after me. A woman will be in Paradise with her last husband of this world. That is why Allāh had forbidden the wives of the Prophet ﷺ from remarrying after him, so they could be his spouses in Paradise (see Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī, *Al-Talkhīṣ al-Ḥabir*, 3:282).

Another opinion states that such a woman will be with the husband who possessed the best conduct. The above means that if a woman had only one husband, she is surely to be with him, even if there

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existed some acrimony between them in the world. Any hatred would be obliterated from all hearts, and Allāh will allow the deepest of love to develop between them.

The most important point here is that there will be no one without a spouse in Paradise. Spouses are a salient feature of Paradise. Paradise is to be enjoyed with a spouse. What is Paradise without one? Hence, the Prophet ﷺ said, "There will be no one without a spouse in Paradise" (*Muslim*, 2834). So a woman or man who never married, or were divorced, will be married to other unmarried or divorced people in Paradise. Everyone will be fully satisfied with their spouses as they will be united harmoniously as soulmates on the same wavelength. No more bitterness or jealousy or hatred. Each will find fulfilment. There will be no need to look at any other except those Allāh has given to them.

A beautiful narration exists through Abū Hurayra ؓ regarding the forerunners who enter Paradise first (may Allāh make us among them). The Prophet ﷺ said,

The first group to enter Paradise will have their faces as bright as the full moon during the moonlit night. They will neither need to spit nor blow their nose nor pass excrement. They will have their amenities and combs therein made of gold and silver, their incense of aloeswood (*uluwwa*), their perspiration musk, and every one of them will have two spouses possessing such beauty that the marrow of their shanks would be visible through the flesh. There would be no dissension among them and no enmity for each other. Their hearts would be like one heart, glorifying Allāh morning and evening (*Muslim*, 2834).

Marriage is therefore a natural calling of the soul, both in this world and the next. While attitudes toward polygamy have warmed recently in the Western world, adultery is still considered repugnant even though many more people are involved in it. This is because people have a natural need for soulmates, and having dedicated partners for life (through marriage) is deeply ingrained in the collective psyche. Adultery is not honourable. I see this as a reflection of the ultimate

state of affairs in Paradise, where people will find satisfaction in their spouses and have no need to look at any another. This is how it all started in the first place anyway, with Ādam and Hawwā ؑ in Paradise.



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رَبَّنَا وَتَقَبَّلْ عَنَّا
رَبَّنَا وَتَقَبَّلْ عَنَّا

Our Lord, grant my prayer. Our Lord, forgive me
and my parents and the believers on the Day when
the Reckoning shall take place (Ibrāhīm, 14:41).

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